

915.2 B11p  
Bache \$2.50  
Paradox Isle

915.2 B11p

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for two weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



**Public Library**  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

KANSAS CITY MO PUBLIC LIBRARY

0 0001 0152401 5




FEB 18 1960



*Paradox Isle*

BE FULLY INFORMED  
READ THESE BOOKS FOR WARTIME

---



---

RETREAT WITH STILWELL. *Jack Belden*

THE JAPANESE ENEMY  
GOVERNMENT BY ASSASSINATION } *Hugh Byas*

PRISONER OF THE JAPS. *Gwen Derw*

THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH *William Yandell Elliott*  
AT WAR and *H. Duncan Hall*

APPEASEMENT'S CHILD. *Thomas J. Hamilton*

INTO THE VALLEY }  
MEN ON BATAAN } *John Hersey*

DESERT WAR }  
DESERT CONQUEST } *Russell Hill*

TWELVE MONTHS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD.  
*Larry Lesueur*

CIRCUIT OF CONQUEST. *Relman Morin*

BERLIN DIARY. *William L. Shirer*

BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA. *Agnes Smedley*

LAST TRAIN FROM BERLIN. *Howard K. Smith*

LESSONS OF MY LIFE. *Lord Vansittart*

THE LAST DAYS OF SEVASTOPOL. *Boris Voyetekhov*



B O R Z O I B O O K S

*published by Alfred A. Knopf*

# PARADOX ISLE



*by* CAROL BACHE



NEW YORK ALFRED A. KNOPF 1943

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN PRODUCED  
IN FULL COMPLIANCE  
WITH ALL GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS  
FOR THE CONSERVATION OF PAPER, METAL,  
AND OTHER ESSENTIAL MATERIALS

*Copyright 1943 by Carol Bache. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine or newspaper. Manufactured in the United States of America.*

FIRST EDITION

*Published simultaneously in Canada by The Ryerson Press*

*FOR*

L. E. S.

# Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. <i>A Search for "the Real Japan"</i>	3
II. <i>A Day of Rest</i>	18
III. <i>Funny Pictures</i>	41
IV. <i>Ancient Gentlemen of Japan</i>	64
V. <i>Churchy-san — Number-One Christian</i>	81
VI. <i>Nonsensical Minutiae</i>	107
VII. <i>The General Saves His Medal</i>	124
VIII. <i>The Judgment of Solomon</i>	147
IX. <i>The First and Last Ambassadors</i>	165

## *Paradox Isle*



---

---

## CHAPTER I

### *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

---

---

*"The little sum of my experience  
Remains the sole contrivance I produce . . ."*

ELINOR WYLIE

---

#### 1

THE Buddhist festival of the dead was ending with a weird but decorous revel, the *O-Bon* dance. Midnight was closing in upon the temple grove as the dancers, worn with three days of worship and merrymaking, ceased their posturing and the clamor of drums and flutes lapsed into silence. It was my first sight of this midsummer festival, and reluctantly I followed my companions from the grove. We took the short way home that led us through the grounds of the Rinnoji Monastery, through a garden that looked mysterious in the moonlight and a little withdrawn, as though it resented intruders during these quiet hours, after giving of itself so generously to the day.

There was the sound of water falling over rocks, and we could hear the monks' voices in the temple chanting

## *Paradox Isle*

sutras. The lower garden lay in darkness, but the shadows sparkled with tiny points of light as the fireflies wove their way in and out of an elaborate ballet. It was so warm that the lattices had been pushed back, and in one of the rooms I saw a young monk seated at a low table, bending over his work. Light from a standing lantern fell upon his shaven head and intent face, and I could imagine the miracle of calligraphy — the Lotus Sutra perhaps — that was taking shape under his writing brush.

The scene was perfect; it was natural; not staged for eager tourists, as we had come upon it quite by chance; and I had a strong intuitive feeling that what I had been seeking since my arrival lay close at hand — a glimpse of “the real Japan.” Rashly I drew closer, walking softly across the grass.

At that instant the temple bell boomed out the hour of midnight in long deliberate strokes that seemed to draw the new day from the old. It filled the night, drowning my footsteps and another sound as well, the rapid click-clack of the typewriter on which the monk was writing, using all of his fingers in the touch system.

It was a bitter blow, but what a paradox! Then and there I abandoned my search for “the real Japan,” realizing in a flash that I had never heard an old resident use the phrase, and when approached by tourists on the subject, his expression had been blank and his replies both vague and contradictory. He knew, of course, that “the real Japan,” if such a thing existed, was everywhere

## *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

and nowhere and far too elusive to be captured out of hand, pinned down and classified. But any country at once so mystifying and so banal must be rich in paradoxes, so why not turn this sad anticlimax to some account as an amusing one, the first of a collection? No sooner had the idea taken shape than its practical advantages were obvious.

I had been in Japan just long enough to know that most people were the slaves of their hobbies; that a passion for Chinese snuff bottles or ivory *netsuke* kept their victims in a continual agony of frustration or perennial bankruptcy; valuable collections required constant care, and special cabinets with wrought iron clasps and velvet-lined compartments to house them. But paradoxes were to be had for the looking, they could be stowed in one's memory, and needed nothing more than to be taken out occasionally and viewed with a new perspective.

For years now, I have been diligently collecting them, spurred on, I suspect, by the secret hope that if enough paradoxes could be laid out end to end, the sum total of them all might be that ephemeral thing we are still seeking — the real Japan.

## 2

Going over my collection one hot summer afternoon, I turned up one of my old favorites, a stilted Japanese account of Princess Yori's birth in 1931. She was the Emperor's fourth daughter, and at the time there was a good

## *Paradox Isle*

deal of unrest resulting from the death struggle of the political parties with the military for supreme power, and the birth of a male heir to the throne was of vital importance. It was said to be the only thing that would save the country from a military dictatorship set up in Tokyo and the forced retirement of the Emperor to Kyoto, as the spiritual ruler of Japan.

During the Empress's pregnancy every imaginable precaution had been taken to ensure the birth of a prince. The shrine of Suitengo-sama had been crowded with earnest suppliants and piled high with votive offerings. The most prominent midwives had been called in, soothsayers consulted, and according to the latter, the baby was sure to be a boy.

When the Day dawned, so ran the account, the decorations in Her Majesty's apartment were all changed and she was moved to a white bed, while men of the imperial household howled at the top of their voices to drive off evil spirits. She lay there ill at ease because in the same room were all the priests summoned to attend the birth, itinerant monks from mountain temples, whose prayers were so potent that they would reach the Buddhas of the Three Worlds, while a continuous stream of messengers trotted in and out with orders for sutras to be said in all the Tokyo temples.

As prescribed by ritual, ladies-in-waiting stood behind a screen on the east side of the bed, and on the west lay the imperial substitutes, clothed like the Empress to de-

## *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

ceive the wicked spirits and divert their attention from the mother and her new-born child. On the south side there were more priests, selected for their extreme ugliness, who groaned and cursed until they were hoarse. They were assisted by twenty archers who twanged their bowstrings to drive off devils bent on harm.

The space between them and the bed on which the Empress lay was very narrow, and she complained that the room was a little crowded, that the noise added to her discomfort. It was a pity, the Japanese narrator conceded, but it could not be helped.

As her hour approached, court physicians with white gowns over medieval court costumes, drew on thin rubber gloves and forced their way to the bedside while all the priests and courtiers covered their heads with rice flour. Nurses appeared in white caps and modern uniforms, inching the delivery table forward with difficulty. Others brought in the "sleep-giving device and other modern means of efficacy." In such a fashion did the Empress, during the Era of Enlightenment, Showa Six (1931), give birth to an imperial princess who, we heard much later, was born a deaf mute.

Before the clashing bells in the newsboys' hands or the sound of cannon fire made the news known in Tokyo, it had been broadcast through the empire on the first national hookup. The Minister of Communications had the signal honor of announcing the birth of the heaven-born. Clad in ancient court dress he stepped to the microphone,

## *Paradox Isle*

and in a perfect cascade of honorifics, bade all loyal sons of Nippon rejoice at the birth of an imperial prince. At the same time, the press was lamenting the arrival of another girl. This resulted in a good deal of confusion. Traditional celebrations for a crown prince were hastily called off, and the women murmured their sympathy for the Empress. "It is pitiful," they said sadly. "She must try again next year."

Meanwhile a deputation of bewildered court officials had called upon the Minister of Communications for an explanation. Had he been misinformed? Did he not know that the royal infant was but another girl?

His Excellency, the article went on to say, faced his inquisitors with complete composure. Certainly, he said, it was well known to him that the baby was but one more daughter. He also knew that the whole empire was united in prayers for a son, and he could not bring himself to profane the most important Japanese invention — the radio — by broadcasting bad news to a loyal people.

The elder statesmen listened attentively to his explanation, and without exception expressed their entire approval. They agreed that it was not only reasonable, but a fine example of *Yamato Damashii*, the ancient spirit of Japan that still flourished triumphant in spite of this onset of Western barbarism.

How amused we had been by such an unexpected denouement. How we had laughed, and discussed the effect on the American people had any cabinet member re-

## *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

sorted to this childish device to make them happy. But the Japanese had not shared our laughter; they had not been amused. In telling the people what they had wished to hear, the minister had acted strictly according to their rule of proper behavior. It is a rule that has developed certain estimable qualities in the Japanese: filial piety, of course, frugality, obedience and intense patriotism. But the abstraction that we know and value as truth does not appear in their code. In fact, there is no word for that precise thing in their language. Sometimes, in dealing with the West, Japan had found it advisable to conform to our inscrutable demand for accuracy; but it was not done on principle; it was never a question of right and wrong; merely a concession to expediency at the moment.

### 3

Though it is open season on paradoxes the year around, unquestionably the best time for hunting is in the summer. Then the European colony has taken to the hills or seashore and the town belongs once more to the Japanese. The hour should be late afternoon, when Tokyo rolls up its bamboo shades, flings wide its lattices and relaxes gratefully in the lengthening shadows after the long hot day.

As I put the clipping away, the pictures it evoked — harassed doctors maneuvering their "modern means of efficacy" through the mad pandemonium, and a cabinet minister demonstrating Japanese "sincerity" at the mi-

## *Paradox Isle*

crophone — reminded me that I needed new additions to my collection. It had aroused the collector's urge and would presently lure me from the shade of a quiet garden into the steaming, noisy town.

From my vantage point on a bus I looked down into the limousine of an ambassador extraordinary who was figuring prominently in the press at that time. I recognized the cruel, clever face with its air of supreme sophistication, and the eyeglass on its broad black ribbon. He was in Tokyo, the paper had said, to advise the new Foreign Minister on affairs of state; he was a scholar of note with degrees from Cambridge and Heidelberg, a good linguist and a cosmopolitan, both of which are rare in Japanese. I had heard elsewhere that he was the type of diplomat who had won Japan first honors in the art of polite deception, and I could see for myself that he was a man of sound common sense as well. His frock coat, striped trousers and white waistcoat, folded with care, lay on the seat beside him near a handsome attaché case; his socks, well-polished shoes and gold-headed cane rode in front with the chauffeur. He still wore his high silk hat, a G-string, his monocle and, strangely enough, his air of sophistication.

While we waited at the crossing I amused myself by picturing his arrival at the Foreign Office. Would he trot past the guards and lounging messengers just as he was, with his chauffeur bearing the sartorial spare parts at a respectful six paces to the rear? Or would he park in the

## *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

porte cochère, pull down the shades and dress in his car like any proletarian on a Fourth of July picnic? Whatever he did — here the green light flashed and his car sped out of sight — he would carry it off with an air, in a manner befitting such an extraordinary ambassador.

### 4

At Hibiya Park we halted again, facing a thin line of police. Western civilization, represented by our rickety motor bus, drew up obediently with screeching brakes to give a gold encrusted shrine drawn by white oxen the right of way. It contained an elbow joint of Gautama Buddha, my neighbor explained in awestruck tones, and pointed to its escort of East Indians who seemed to be floating along above the hot pavement in their pastel-colored robes of gauze. Next came a group of priests, gorgeous in scarlet, green and gold, wearing tiny horse-hair hats. Time stepped back two hundred years when they raised the conch shells to their lips, and the shrill discord of modern Tokyo was engulfed in a deep moaning roar.

Close on the heels of their high lacquered clogs followed a rearguard of Japanese schoolgirls in middy blouses and serge skirts, their gold teeth and spectacles flashing in the sunlight. They straggled by in a thick cloud of dust scuffed up by their ill-fitting shoes, and their voices rose dutifully above the dwindling bellow of the conch shells in a familiar refrain.

## *Paradox Isle*

"Buddha loves me, this I know,  
For the Sutras tell me so!"

For a moment I failed to recognize the hymn, although I had frequently heard errand boys singing *Suwanee Gawa* or *Orudo Buracku Joe* and been solemnly assured that they were old Japanese folk songs. The homely air, raised now in Buddha's praise, made me think of the time a friend of mine had arrived at Kyoto with a mountain of hand luggage, and looked about in vain for a taxi.

"Where are they all," she had asked the porter. "Is it a national holiday, or what?"

"No holiday," he told her. "Only the annual baseball game between the Buddhists and Catholics, but it's taken every car in town to the stadium."

### 5

Without warning, a heavy shower descended from a tiny, frivolous looking cloud, the *yudachi* that falls dependably on summer afternoons to lay the dust and clear the crowded streets. As the first drops smacked softly on the pavement, everyone fled for cover except the occasional Japanese in native dress who took the hem of his kimono and tucked it in his belt, proceeding bare-shanked about his affairs.

A secondhand bookstore not only provided me with shelter but offered as well a diverting hour among its

## *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

waifs and strays. Those prodigals of the book world have an unfailing attraction that their conventional brethren, making routine departures from library shelves, woefully lack. The same element of chance that brought them to this remote haven seemed to have had a hand in their arrangement there, as a Japanese bookseller is obliged to group his foreign books according to the one word he may recognize in their titles, and it makes for strange bedfellows sometimes.

Running my eyes along the shelves, I saw that they were, for once, painfully correct except *The Dance of Life* by Havelock Ellis which stood cheek by jowl with Arthur Murray's *Art of the Dance*; and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* did not seem at ease between two copies of the St. James Bible.

The shop owner was sound asleep, squatting crosslegged on a cushion, and I had the place to myself except for a shabby, half-starved student who was scowling earnestly at something he had found in a book of English verse. He was probably too poor to own his textbooks and, like many others, was obliged to do his studying in the dark little bookstores that eked out a precarious existence in the shadow of Tokyo's universities. I wondered what he was mouthing so determinedly, when he looked up and closed the book with a sigh.

"Rady," he said suddenly. "Madame, kind to inform why came you to Japan and whence, America? America is strong; America is rich. What wish she with Japan,

## *Paradox Isle*

so small, so poor, but rich indeed in art, the spirit that America is the — *narikin* . . .”

He tried it out in Japanese tentatively, hoping it might bring the English word to mind, and his eye had the look of cataleptic blankness that goes with an effort of memory. So I came to his rescue.

“Upstart,” I prompted.

“Sank you, sank you,” he muttered in a hurried aside before assuming his public speaker’s voice again. “America the upstart nation do not understand. But wait. One day hence Japan’s gurous, undefeated army will teach money-mad neighbor — neighbor . . .”

This time I let him flounder, as I had had about enough. His dull Mongoloid features and bullet head showed all too plainly the type of soldier he would be, fed on a national grievance, given a weapon and told to go ahead. As I rose and turned away he hastily abandoned the speech he had memorized for some such occasion, snatched up the book of verse and held it out to me.

“Rady, madame. Purease not to stood up and went away,” he pleaded. “Assist me to my study very difficult. I do not understand. Teach to me the Japanese.”

Frankly curious I took the book, and was moved to something like sympathy for this unsavory victim of Japan’s educational system when I read:

“Go and catch a falling star,  
Get with child a mandrake root.”

## *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

A row of agitated ideographs followed the last line and I would have given much to know what the Japanese translator made of it. I had heard it claimed in all seriousness that their translations of Shakespeare's plays were a great improvement on the originals, but an attempt to confine Donne's wild magnificence in a sparse, inflexible language like Japanese required even greater hardihood.

"Tell me where all past years are,  
Or who cleft the devil's foot,"

No wonder the wretched boy had been defeated by such an assignment, and I thought of Lafcadio Hearn's remark in his *Diary of a Teacher* that it was a real hardship for youths nourished on a diet of fish and rice to digest the culture of meat-eating people.

"Teach me to hear mermaids' singing,  
Or to keep off envy's stinging,"

Why, I could not make sense of the simplest line in Japanese — not my brand of Japanese. Aghast at my predicament, I read the verse through slowly, putting off the moment when I must say something to the student who stood there, eyeing me hopefully as he wiped his nose on the back of his hand.

"And find  
What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind."

## *Paradox Isle*

I drew a long breath. "It is indeed a perplexing subject," I assured him rapidly in English. "You must be very erudite to have been given a poem replete with esoteric allusions that only a scholar like your professor could interpret it adequately. *Sayonara*," I said hastily. "Good-bye," and beat an ignoble retreat during the inevitable moment of mental paralysis that surprise inflicts on a Japanese.

The rain was over and once more the sky was luminous where the cloud had passed. It had cleared away the hovering dust clouds, polished the leaves of the plane trees, so at every stir of air they showed a flash of silver-green; it had also brought to new and potent life the odor of burnt fish, bad sanitation, woodsmoke and incense, the strong compounded flavor of the country and its toil-ridden people.

Life and motion had returned to the streets. I narrowly avoided head-on collisions with scampering, naked babies, and picked my way through a group of women who had squatted informally on the narrow pavement to gossip over the heads of their nursing babies.

An old vendor of windbells appeared from some temporary refuge pushing a handcart hung with bits of colored glass, moving everywhere to the cool sound of elfin chimes. I passed wooden tubs drawn out to the sidewalk with grandmother or grandfather inside, as much at home apparently as Diogenes. Reluctant to forego their privileged first turn at the family bath and unwilling to miss

## *A Search for "the Real Japan"*

anything, they sat there soaking and chatting affably with friends through a shifting cloud of steam.

In that hour between the lights, those details contributing to the peculiar character of the Japanese seemed to stand out with arresting clarity and a new significance.

They emphasized the wide gulf extending between them and our own people, who though mentally diffuse, conceal their inherent lives behind four walls. Why wander so far a-field in my quest, I thought, when the most striking paradox of all was the Japanese himself? Intellectually so secretive that his facial expression and spoken words masked rather than expressed his thoughts, he lived most of his life out in the public highway with the intimacies of existence heedlessly on display.

---

---

## CHAPTER II

### *A Day of Rest*

---

---

*"I have never found any companion so companionable as solitude."*

THOREAU

---

#### 1

Moving has always ranked high on my list of major calamities. My childhood was spread over almost every state in the Union, and we always arrived at our new post with nerves as ragged as the fringe on our old-fashioned bath towels, our particular treasures broken beyond repair, while the family atrocities, donations from more affluent relatives mostly, emerged from the barrels and boxes intact. We never seemed to acquire any sort of technique, which normally rewards all laborious repetitions, except the faculty for tossing aside all recollection of our ordeal with the bits of twine and excelsior, with the result that each move was no better than the last.

By the time I arrived in Japan I was certain that any habitation, however unpleasant, was preferable to a move, especially in a country where everything works in

## *A Day of Rest*

reverse, and is conducted in its wholly preposterous language. Nothing short of a Japanese Methodist landlord, determined to run my household on strictly Wesleyan principles, could have hounded me out of my settled abode and into a new one, or my *amah* into her Japanese shotgun wedding and her subsequent rôle of honest woman.

But moving in Japan was really moving *de luxe*, and had any "old Japan hand" happened to mention the fact, I should have been saved much needless anxiety before I finally undertook the ordeal. No one told me that when I hired a truck — and those were the days before the army had taken them all — the driver would arrive before dawn on the fatal day bringing friends to help him gather up all the odds and ends having no place of their own and tie them together in huge squares of colored cotton cloth.

I was surprised to see the errand boys from the shops I had dealt with appear in clean coolie coats with their master's crest stamped in red on the back. They had been given the day off to help me, they announced, a mute but effective protest against removing my patronage with my household. Soon, all the *kozo* from the shops in the new neighborhood arrived in equally brave array to ensure future business, though nothing so crude was mentioned or even implied. There was a good deal of bowing, compliments were exchanged, and each boy selected some breakable object he fancied to carry with him by hand.

## *Paradox Isle*

The heavy pieces went in the truck, an incredible number, fitted in with the greatest skill and care, and soon an impressive procession set out, with the truck in the lead, followed by two lines of acolytes mounted on bicycles, each bearing a lamp or a vase with an air of deep reverence. Occasionally one would dismount and fall out of line so that some passer-by might inspect whatever he had in his charge; its probable value would be discussed, the age, nationality and name of its owner furnished before they parted. They agreed ruefully that these foreign names were the devil and all to pronounce.

Allowing for these slight social interludes, they were back in no time for another lot, and before I had believed it possible the old house was cleared of everything it contained, and a squad of charwomen, who must have been waiting offstage for their cue, swarmed in from the wings and took over.

Transportation for myself and the livestock was provided by the new landlord's chauffeur, who drove up with his master's limousine, an ancient, high-swung affair, and offered its use as a taxi. Seeing me demur, he assured me it was the custom, and anyway it was all right, he said, because his master was drunk. He was drunk every evening, in fact, and could be counted upon to sleep it off every day; so the car was at my disposal at all times until nightfall brought its owner to life again. Oh yes, this arrangement had his master's august approval as it saved him a chauffeur's wages to spend on *saké* and *geisha*. He

## *A Day of Rest*

was a very fine gentleman indeed, the chauffeur added admiringly, very fond of his wine and the ladies.

Thus reassured, I stowed the dogs and the birds in the car and we drove with a flourish to find the new house humming with life and activity like some well-ordered hive. All the curtains were hung and the rugs were all down; some of the *kozo* were whisking furniture into place under the basilisk eye of Suzuki, the cook. Others, more artistically inclined, gravely conferred about the best place to hang my Hiroshige prints.

By ten o'clock it was over. Everything was in place and in working order; nothing moved but the dogs who sniffed through a tour of inspection, lured by new smells. Echoes of subdued laughter drifted in from the servant's room where the *kozo* were squatting around a low table, eating a meal that had been hastily ordered by telephone and brought to the door in blue and white bowls with red lacquer covers.

They had earned it, I thought, and the beer that was rapidly increasing their merriment. They had moved all my possessions in something under two hours, and with so much goodwill and good humor that a wearisome task had been converted, miraculously, into a new and odd sort of outing.

Bright sunlight, filtering through the trees outside the moon window, traced a medallion of intricate design on the floor mats, and in the shrine next door someone was beating a drum. The strokes came slowly at first, with

## *Paradox Isle*

measured rhythm that quickened into a steady roar before it broke off as abruptly as it had begun. In the silence that followed an old priest raised a quavering chant that was cracked through occasionally with the hoarseness of great age.

I liked this new place. The sounds of Japanese life reached me here mellowed by distance, bringing a color and flavor that life in a strictly foreign compound undoubtedly lacked. Then the news that my new landlord was a gay old blade, a night-blooming cereus only, was the answer to a bedeviled tenant's prayer after my astringent experience with a Methodist Japanese house-owner.

Now that it was all over and viewed from a comfortable distance, the whole episode dwindled to its proper comic proportions. It was the sort of thing that could never have happened at home, but out there at the ends of the earth and within the confines of an island, we were more apt to lose our sense of perspective. I could imagine the average American's amazed disbelief if I told them that the love affair of an obscure *amah* in my house with a youthful greengrocer had caused our embassy weeks of concern. And that gravely discussed, greatly deplored, it had finally been pronounced a menace to good international relations.

It was just too, too unfortunate, said the fretful young diplomat who relayed to me the scandalized protest of my landlord against the unseemly affair. Although the principals were of no social importance whatever, he

## *A Day of Rest*

added hastily, my landlord happened to be a high-ranking admiral in the Japanese navy, aide to Prince Takamatsu, and a nephew of the Japanese ambassador in Washington.

"So you can see very well how an affair like this might become far-reaching and serious," he said importantly. "Perhaps I had better talk to this *femme fatale* myself."

Nobu, the scarlet woman, was summoned, and I watched with no little amusement what the sight of that huge, unromantic creature did to the earnest young man's aplomb. He rallied, however, and repeated the admiral's arraignment in his meticulous Japanese, to which Nobu listened with polite attention and quite obvious perplexity. She admitted having a lover with the utmost simplicity, but perceiving no connection whatever between a natural desire and moral lapse, she could see no necessity to legalize it. This was her first encounter with our Western concept of sin and she was genuinely puzzled, evidently regarding sex matters with the untroubled reasonableness of her race.

It was only when she realized that her humble romance was inconveniencing someone that the young man began to make headway. Ah, that was indeed reprehensible, it was labeled as such in her code, and she flushed scarlet with shame and remorse. As soon as she grasped that aspect, she capitulated eagerly.

I thought it was time to take a hand; so I told her to marry or not as she pleased, but to be certain that she

## *Paradox Isle*

wanted to marry Tanaka before she made any promises. She beamed on us both, her customary cheerfulness restored by this opportunity to make amends, and assured me that it really made no difference to her at all because she would have to marry sometime. She did not know Tanaka's "spirit" as well as she might, but at least she knew him by sight, and that was more than the average Japanese bride had any right to expect.

Tanaka was approached next and gave a sheepish consent to an immediate wedding. Suzuki offered her services as "go-between," and a date was set then and there in deference to the admiral's blood pressure. Nobu's "mama-san" gave her blessing on condition that the nuptials be solemnized at her home in the country; Tanaka's father expressed his approval with some ill-timed references to his son's past peccadilloes; papers were signed and re-signed at the ward office; and presents came in from friends and relations. Even the American Embassy sent a gift of which Nobu was inordinately proud, giving it the place of honor with its accompanying card, which fortunately her Japanese friends could not read.

At last the wedding day dawned. The bridegroom put in a prompt appearance, clad in black silk garments of ceremony which lent his usual loutishness a sort of spurious dignity. Nobu might have stood for a heroic figure of Autumn, with her tear-battered face and wedding kimono of fawn-colored crêpe, patterned in red and brown maple leaves.

## *A Day of Rest*

A taxi was found with a door wide enough to admit Nobu's bulk, and Tanaka scrambled in without a glance at his bride, who followed him into the car with no more than becoming reluctance and an unquenchable zest gleaming through her tears for whatever the future might bring.

The very next day I had moved, filled with needless alarm but with no regrets except, perhaps, for an elaborate "nightingale fence" that had enclosed and given such an air of charm to the garden.

### 2

All that had happened yesterday, and I found it hard to believe that only twenty-four hours intervened. The complete change of scene, like a mythical date line effecting an unmarked lapse of time in our lives, had lent it perspective, and somehow tomorrow seemed equally distant. For that moment at least, life had ceased to drive before the wind of daily exactions, and had reached still waters and anchored there. Why not avail myself of this date line, I thought, why not have his one day to myself, calling it lost somewhere between the old house and the new? The place was well fitted for solitude anyway, standing as it did on a hill.

The sight of Suzuki with some food on a tray seemed to crystallize my intention, for I told her: "With what remains of the day we do as we please. You had better take rest; I am sure you must need it. I remain here by myself

## *Paradox Isle*

to absorb the feeling of the new house. Do not let anyone in, for to do this I must be alone."

The old woman nodded. "I shall not fail you," she promised, closing the door as she left with the extravagant care one associates with a sickroom.

At last I was free to relax and enjoy the mild sense of adventure that goes with a change of abode because we are never quite our same selves again. We seem to discard the parts of our temperament that fitted the old environment and replace them with a life and habits to harmonize with the new one. Perhaps the joys and sorrows of its former owners linger about, distilling a subtle influence that alters our own identity.

The Japanese believe something like this, but with them it is no idle fancy. Every precaution is taken whenever they move or build a new home that the site or the house itself is not haunted. But a haunted house in Japan, you must know, is not one that harbors a harmless *shiryō*, or spirit of the dead, for the dead share the daily lives of their relatives, and their invisible presence is serenely taken for granted.

What the Japanese dread and guard against is the *iki-ryō*, a spirit of consummate evil evoked by a living soul — the anger or jealousy of someone who was wronged perhaps — though the victim oftentimes bears no conscious ill will. This fiend, in various guises, goes about in search of the culprit, wreaking vengeance sometimes

## *A Day of Rest*

on innocent people, but unfailingly it returns at last and destroys the one who engendered it.

There is a *Noh* play written on this very subject, a gruesome, nerve-wracking affair. It recounts the death of the Princess Aoi at the hands of an *iki-ryō* created by her devouring jealousy of her husband — the famous Prince Genji — and his latest paramour. In the play, Aoi never appears on the stage, and is represented by a splendid scarlet brocade kimono placed downstage and arranged with deliberate artistry to suggest a sinister, crouching shape, the personification of the jealousy that is destroying her. It seemed to materialize as we watched, and gradually dominated the scene.

I know it haunted me for days — the vague, ghostly action, and the endless death throes of the princess described by the chorus in music that echoed and wailed through the hall like an east wind searching Irish ruins. The moral was plain, of course, but what a curse a bad conscience must be to a Japanese that he should symbolize it in such horrifying form. Small wonder that General Iwane Matsui renounced the world temporarily and entered a monastery to meditate on the rape of Nanking, though I should have thought *hara-kiri* infinitely preferable to life harried by an *iki-ryō* such as his.

Perhaps our Methodist admiral had an *iki-ryō* at large in his family, as I had read somewhere that a Mizuno,

## *Paradox Isle*

Lord of Echizen, was goaded by such a sense of sin during his term as Prime Minister for the Shogunate that he had tried to abolish the theatre entirely, on the grounds that it was contaminating the Japanese people. Both conscience and curse had evidently been inherited — here the door slid back softly and Suzuki came in, ostensibly for the tray.

“There is a man at the door,” she said with that bland disregard for the given word which so outrages the West. “He wishes to sell you his son.”

“Now why on earth should I want to buy his son?”

“No reason, but of that I could not be sure until I inquired.”

“I never heard of a Japanese who would sell his son. Did he say why?”

“He has no daughters,” Suzuki replied, picking up the tray. “There are many mouths to feed and not enough rice for all. The man wants ten *yen* for the boy, but in his condition it is far too much money.”

They were in the front entry, filthy and ragged enough to have stolen the thunder of any scarecrow I ever beheld. The father threw me a surly glance but the tiny boy crouched at his feet never looked up, being deeply absorbed with his two hands that were covered with running sores, blowing on them gently to ease his torment. I thought of smallpox, of course.

“Ask him what is wrong with the boy.”

The man’s sullen face darkened as Suzuki relayed my

## *A Day of Rest*

question, but he shook his head. The boy was not ill, but a dwarf. He had now seven years and soon should be doing a man's work at the mines. Never would he earn the worth of his rice, as he refused to grow. He was worthless.

"But his hands, Suzuki-san."

"Have no fear, I have seen that often enough. It comes from bad food — more often from no food at all."

That settled it, of course. The man took the ten *yen* we gave him, stowed it away in his rags and walked out of the gate with as little heed for the boy as though he had just left a sack of rice on our doorstep.

Roused by the stir of departure, the boy glanced up from his hands and his eyes widened with terror at sight of me. Crying shrilly, he scrambled into the corner and made himself small, shaking so that the glass door behind rattled violently, the way it does during an earthquake.

"He thinks you are a devil," Suzuki explained with her usual candor and force. "He sees the foreign lady for the first time."

"Well, it certainly complicates matters," I said. "It means we must board him out somewhere. He can't stay here — the poor child will die of fright."

We stood looking on with inept pity while the boy wept, murmuring broken words to himself as though he had surrendered all hope of survival.

"I simply can't stand this, it is too pitiful," I broke out. "If only Nobu were here. She knows just what to do for

## *Paradox Isle*

anything that is sick or sorry." But my lament had hardly begun when Suzuki cut it short briskly.

"Nobu-san waits now — in the kitchen." She spoke clearly to cut through my bewilderment, and with a smug air of triumph, slid back the kitchen door to disclose the bride, seated there in all her wedding finery.

"Here I am *okusan*," Nobu quavered, uncertain of her reception. "I wished to offer my greetings, but the Old One said you must not be disturbed."

"Nobu-san, you'll never know how glad I am to see you. But what happened?" My first feeling of relief swallowed up in dismay. "Did you change your mind about marrying Tanaka?"

For some reason both women found this amusing. "No anxiety," Nobu said when their laughter had died down. "We are now married, but when the priest left and the feasting began I became very homesick. The good things to eat all remained in my throat when I thought of you and the Old One, the dogs and the honorable sparrows," naming the household in order of rank. "My mama-san said: 'Return to the town. So large a bride as yourself if she weeps will ruin the finest feast.' I came back."

"But Tanaka —"

"That one! He eats and drinks and will return after the feast, I suppose, if he has not had too much *saké*."

"Very well then. Now, Nobu-san, you must help me with this boy." Dismissing the bridegroom, we plunged into the business at hand. "What can we do for him?"

## *A Day of Rest*

"First we feed him." As Suzuki made off toward the kitchen, she continued. "Then he comes home with me. I won't be so lonely with the boy to look after. Tanaka, too, will be glad to have a son already past the troublesome age who can soon help him with the vegetable shop. Condescend to watch, *okusan*. If he eats he will no longer fear me."

Taking the food from Suzuki, she inched along toward the boy on her knees to a soothing accompaniment of chuckles and clucks, holding the bowl at arm's length. We all waited with bated breath, and after a minute or so the child ceased to tremble, for hunger had crowded out fear with those tempting food smells at hand. Springing at the dish with a strange animal cry, he thrust his face deep into the food, gulping it down as though he feared it might be snatched from him.

Everyone beamed foolishly, and Nobu began to plan the child's future, borne along on the flood of her incurable optimism. He was no dwarf, she declared. He had been carrying sacks of coal on his head in the Hakone mines since he could walk. Many times she had seen them — mere babies — bent under loads that would cripple a strong man. He would bring them good fortune too, such as came to the old couple who discovered their boy in a peachstone. "*Momotaro*, you know, *okusan*. We shall call him Taro, and with us he will be *taihen* heppy, but from you he would run away."

"We can try it anyway," I agreed, thankful for such

## *Paradox Isle*

a simple solution. "But first he must go to the doctor and have his hands treated. See if the compound chauffeur can take us. You can get into that car, I feel sure."

### 3

It was late afternoon before we reached the new mission hospital that sprawled across several acres of Tokyo's river district. Nobu, who occupied most of the front seat in order to shield the child on her knees from the sight of my terrifying countenance, now shifted her burden for a better view of the new Christian "die house."

"It's too large," she muttered, eyeing with superstitious awe the tier upon tier of glittering windows, pulsating in the late sunlight like the beat of the anxious hearts behind them. "With so many sick ones to care for, some must be left to die untended. And that," pointing to a frieze of lotus blossoms just visible under the eaves, "is very bad omen indeed. Anyone near to death could not recover in place showing our funeral flower everywhere."

Once inside we were promptly rescued from the apparently aimless crowd of patients by an American nurse on duty.

"What have you got hold of now?" she wanted to know, eyeing our charge with professional detachment. "Luckily the doctor is free for a moment and can attend to the boy right away. You had better come with me to the waiting room, but your *amah* can go in with him." Nobu nodded, unable to speak for the strangle hold Taro had

## *A Day of Rest*

on her neck, after one look at the nurse's red hair.

I followed the nurse through the halls, and finally she stopped for a moment in one of the big wards where the windows faced west. There, people lying in their beds were waiting for the clouds to move off so the weary day might end with a sight of Fuji-san, standing against a red-stained sky that bathed her icy slopes in a rosy, nacreous glow. Close by, a covey of nurses fluttered around one of the beds, binding a woman into it with long strips of white cloth.

"Do you keep your insane patients in with the others?" I asked, indicating the curious performance, and the nurse turned on me indignantly.

"What a silly question," she grumbled, "from one who has been here as long as you. How do you suppose we keep our new Japanese patients from rolling out of bed every time they turn over? Most of the ward cases have never seen a bed. They have slept on the floor all their lives."

I should have guessed, it was true. I knew that recruits were always lashed to their narrow cots when they first joined the army, so that the few hours allotted to soldiers for sleep might not be broken by thumps and startled yells from boys straight out of green paddy fields.

An emergency case called the nurse away, and I wandered into the first waiting room I saw which seemed to be empty. When my eyes grew accustomed to the semi-gloom, I made out a row of silent, waiting figures against

## *Paradox Isle*

the wall, each one apparently wrapped in an isolating garment of his own anxiety, oblivious to all else.

From where I sat I could see the length of the vacant corridor and the line of closed doors, over which small green lights blinked eerily now and then. Baskets of flowers and dwarf trees stood outside each one, as though the ground had been cleared for the battle going on within. How unnerving this silence must be to the Japanese, I thought, and the smell of disinfectants too, after the turmoil of their own hospitals where people swarm in and out at all hours, and the place reeks of fried fish and bad sanitation, just as their houses do. These people seemed to be holding their breath, to be listening for someone who would shortly appear and turn their present dread into fatal certainty. Soon I began to share their uneasiness, and wished that I had hunted up the foreigners' waiting room with its limp copies of mission journals, when the American nurse appeared suddenly and sat down.

"So this is where you are. I've been hunting for you to say that the boy you brought in is all right," she said briskly. "There's nothing wrong but starvation, and if looks mean anything, the *amah* who has him will fix that right up. I've told her what to do for his hands — now for God's sake, what's this?"

She was on her feet at sight of a young man carrying a child that was limp and waxen, except for flaming patches on its hands and face. In a flash of white the nurse

## *A Day of Rest*

had confronted him, her thin shoulders braced for some new and unimagined emergency.

"Erysipelas!" She exclaimed in Japanese. "Who sent you up here? They must know we can't take him in. He must go to the isolation hospital. Erysipelas is infectious."

The man shook his head. "Not in Japan, so they will not take him there. Long ago the Emperor left it out of his list of infectious diseases. Until our Emperor declares it to be so, it is illegal for erysipelas to be infectious here." He spoke wearily, as though he recited a lesson that had long since ceased to have any meaning for him.

The nurse looked across at me. "God, what a country!" she said in English, and the man turned away with a sigh.

"We have been to every hospital in Tokyo," he muttered, looking down at the child. "Now he must die I think; it cannot be helped."

"Here now, that's no way to talk." The man's despair was a challenge she could not resist. "We won't let that happen you know. We'll make a place for the boy and the devil take the police. Condescend to follow me."

As they disappeared a sort of community sigh went up from the shadowy people in the room, and I saw that this brief drama had broken the spell that lay on them, brought them a feeling of reassurance by reducing the hospital to the comfortable level of ordinary humanity. It ceased to be an abode of mystery and ghastly smells, and became a refuge where everyone — even poor people like themselves — was sheltered and cared for by foreigners who

## *Paradox Isle*

did not even fear the police. They relaxed the way everyone does when the doctor takes charge, and a ripple of talk flowed around the walls among them.

A small boy, who up to that time had clung to his grandmother's chair, now found courage to stump creakily across the room to a window and fling it wide, so the known and friendly noises of the street below rushed into the room past his bullet head.

"Well now, that is good," his grandmother exclaimed in a piercing undertone. "Not another moment could I have stood the silence nor the dreadful stench. Had you not noticed it?" she demanded of the room at large. "Yet I was sent from my daughter's bedside when I asked for a little charcoal to fry the fine mess of eels I brought for her supper. 'You cannot cook anything in the wards,' they said. 'The smell will annoy the patients,' they said, and sent me outside to wait for the baby to come."

The hoarse bellow of a river boat engulfed someone's soothing reply, and as it sidled into its slip with diminishing grunts, the old lady took up her grievance again.

"'And why do you want your son born in a place like this?' I ask my daughter. But she says it is 'so modern,' which is all you can say for it, I tell her." The old voice trailed off in a sniff of derision. "Now I hold that the old ways are best, with a skilled midwife coming in on the Day of the Dog every month to pray for an easy birth. If this were one of our hospitals, the family could come and stay the day, cooking their meals by her bedside so

## *A Day of Rest*

she could enjoy the smell of good home food, not smother in stinks like this."

She stopped suddenly as everybody's attention swung away to a newcomer who, after looking in vain for another place, slid into a chair beside me. For a long moment everyone stared unwinkingly, as Japanese do, at this little old man in a blue carpenter's coat that was worn thin by many washings. A mean looking oaf on his other side glowered at him, but encountering a smile of simple friendliness, he relaxed into a grudging inquiry as to what the old man's ailment might be.

"I have nothing wrong, thanks for your interest," the carpenter said. "Never a day's work have I missed through illness, except after drinking too much *saké*. I have come to pay my debt in blood."

"In blood!" The disagreeable man's gasp twanged like a broken *samisen* string. "Do they require payment in blood?"

The carpenter laughed. "They ask no pay at all, though they took my wife in at the time of the Big Cold last year and kept her until cherry blossom time. I had been without work for many moons. I have now learned that they sometimes have need of good red blood to give the honored sick ones, so I came to register mine. It was all I had. Today I am called for the first time. I wait now to pay my debt in part to a young mother in difficult child-birth." He looked so happy at the prospect that his neighbor was moved to unaccountable anger.

## *Paradox Isle*

"Old One," he growled, "you are no better than a fool to give payment before it is asked. And at your age you need what little blood you have left."

The carpenter looked surprised at such rancor. "Well then, if I do not have enough, my family will share. It is a family debt, after all." And this meant that he was the eldest male, head of his clan, who could call on its remotest member at any time for blood or bones, or whatever he happened to need.

A young doctor was inspecting the room from the doorway, and came across on quiet feet to the two.

"Kato-san, the carpenter?" The old man stood up like a soldier going into action. Then to the other one the doctor said, holding himself sternly as the bearer of bad news, "You have made twins," seeming to raise his voice like a weapon to hurl the ugly words. "*Futago*, both girls." Then he tactfully turned his eyes away, omitting the usual words of congratulation in view of such a calamity.

A flutter of horrified sympathy stirred the attentive circle, although the man had been spared the ultimate disgrace of having a boy and a girl. Even now in Japan, except among Westernized Japanese, the birth of twins is considered sheer degradation. One of them usually disappears, by adoption, let us hope, into a distant branch of the family, but people think it wiser not to inquire.

The mean little man stood transfixed, his face the color of chalk. Turning blindly, he stumbled to the door like

## *A Day of Rest*

someone finding his way through sleep, and the taunting voice of a coastwise steamer followed him out with sharp derisive hoots.

### 4

We drove home through the darkening streets in silence, except for the lullaby that Nobu hummed to the sleeping boy in her arms: "*Nen-nen-yo-o, Korokoro yo.*" It occurred to me for the first time how cozy a Japanese twilight was compared to the terrifying grandeur of a Peking sunset. There, the eye travels over acres of simply incredible roofs that stand out in the clear light like a cluster of semi-precious stones — jade, amber, and lapis, amethyst or topaz — then on out to great stretches of tawny country until it is stopped by the ragged line of the Western Hills. But the imagination goes on unrestrained, roaming beyond the Great Wall into Mongolia, Turkestan or Tibet — through all the fabulous countries made real to us by Hedin, Fleming, and Lattimore.

In Japan, however, the twilight is deeply domestic. The horizon seems companionably close, voices take on an intimacy seldom heard in the day, and one's fancy is not tempted to stray beyond the surrounding houses where preparations for the night are going on inside. Outlined against white paper *shoji* upstairs, women are spreading out quilts, putting their babies to bed. Downstairs, the clink of charcoal broken on lamp-stained door stones comes through the clatter of dishes and the maids' shrill laughter. The streets are soft with the blue haze of cook-

## *Paradox Isle*

ing fires, and the smell of fish fried in deep fat draws the children home from their play, though with many a backward glance for the old bubble vendor who continues to stand at the corner under the light, sending up an iridescent shower as long as the pennies hold out.

Roused by the car's sudden halt, I saw that we were nearing home. We had stopped at the neighborhood bathhouse. Light shone through the frosted glass doors on the row of wooden clogs lined up in the entry. Their owners were all inside, of course, squatting up to their chins in boiling water, gulping innumerable cups of tea, exchanging gossip while they steamed out the aches and fatigues of their day.

Somehow the chauffeur managed to extricate Nobu without waking the boy in her arms, and, when her farewell to me was accomplished, that buoyant father of seven called after her: "Remember now, if you tire of that fine child, just send him to me!"

"Not a chance!" Nobu replied and laughed till the child's bony arms, heavy with bandages, swung to and fro like twin pendulums, but he slept on undisturbed.

At the house Suzuki conveyed by her fine air of severity just what she thought of the whole rash proceeding, but all she said was: "The honored neighbors on the left wish to celebrate your arrival in this compound. They say, condescend to come in for cocktails on your return."

"I'll go right over," I told her. "After my day of rest it is just what I need."

---

---

## CHAPTER III

### *Funny Pictures*

---

---

. . . *"When an institution whose roots are not among the people is introduced, it is like plucking flowers from a neighbor's garden to embellish the dying branches of one's own tree; there can be no life."*

LIANG CHI-CHAO

---

#### 1

**A**n inconsequential impulse sent me to Peking in the autumn of 1935. It was one of those unexpected urges that crops up as a result of our abiding sense of impermanence out there. A lack of balance noticeable even in those who have put down roots of a sort in the Far East. It makes us restless, keeps us half in motion toward some distant place and almost anything is enough to set us on our way. I remember making a hurried trip to China one year because I heard someone say behind me: "Well, you know where the Huang Ho meets the Yangtze . . ." And though I suspected he was wrong about the meeting of the rivers, the names were enough to put me on the next boat for Shanghai.

## *Paradox Isle*

This Peking trip had a mild backing of reason in the fact that Japan was making definite efforts to detach the five northern provinces of China from their rather tenuous allegiance to Nanking. Things happen without warning in the East, and the presentiment that this time would be the last time sent me hurrying back to my favorite haunts, so that I might recall them in the years to come, complete with color, scent, and sounds.

I stood at the rail of the *Choko Maru* with Peking an exhilarating memory and the return trip to Japan immediately ahead. Below me on the Tangku dock was the usual cursing, yelling, hawking crowd of Chinese, and I wondered if the Japanese army officers lining the rail alongside were contrasting the teeming uproar at their feet with the order, precision and deadly lack of incident about a ship's sailing in their own country.

At Yokohama or at Kobe the Japanese stand in uniform ranks, waiting in stoic silence for the ship to depart. Here and there a woman dabs at a surreptitious tear, first making sure, however, that her unseemly display of emotion is unobserved. The men gaze fixedly at the departee who stands at the ship's rail grasping a strip of colored serpentine as though it were the last tangible link with home and friends and a familiar world.

In Japan too, no one ever seems to miss the boat. But in China the travel scene is not complete until some frantic passenger has trampled his way through the crowd just as the ship pulls into midstream. He stands aghast, sur-

## *Funny Pictures*

rounded by his luggage and his friends who drown his furious curses with such loud, unfeeling laughter that everyone joins in.

This time the belated travelers were a carload of reluctant pigs who were rushed forward at the last moment and swung aboard unceremoniously by their tails. When their ear-splitting protests had dwindled to muffled squeals and grunts below decks, I heard someone say behind me: "Oh, there she is"; and "I say, we had just about decided that you weren't aboard."

I turned to find young Travers of the Chartered Bank of India and his American wife behind me. Their voices roused the two Japanese next me from their cataleptic state of immobility, and with a hostile glance, they sought a more congenial neighborhood, while the Traverses took their places at the rail.

"Have you seen your stable-mate yet?" Jerry Travers asked, and his wife nodded. "Yes, we thought we'd better warn you."

"Not yet," I admitted with a sinking heart. "But tell me the worst. What is she like?"

"She's pretty grim. The best way to describe her is to say that her name 'Miss Minerva Penny' fits her exactly. She's taken over the whole place. . . ."

"Which means she is English," said his wife, "and if you hope to salvage a single coathanger for yourself you had better hurry down."

I groaned aloud. "There is one like that on every ship,

## *Paradox Isle*

and she's always in my cabin. Coming over I had the German Embassy doctor's Chinese concubine, and she was charming. But that sort of luck never strikes twice on the same trip."

"Come and have a drink," Travers suggested, offering the unfailing panacea. "Give you strength to cope with her."

"Not yet, thanks. Later on. I'm staying on deck a little longer. I have a feeling this is my last look at China."

Polly Travers swept the open, naked landscape with indifferent eyes. "It shouldn't hold you long," she said. "When you yet tired of it, be sure and join us at the bar."

We had left Tangku and were steaming downstream with the tide, a line of sea-scarred vessels, showing the tattered flags of many nations. Although we were spaced at prudent intervals, a mud-colored roller swept along in our wake, flooding the nearest fields, flinging somnolent boatmen into frantic action as their tethered junks reared and collided like frightened horses on a picket line. A herd of goats stampeded up the bank to safety, leaving a kid to struggle in the scummy waters until a tiny goatherd rushed to the rescue. With his dripping charge held close, he stood on the bank and hurled a volley of clanging syllables after us, shaking his fist at the hated red-stained flag at our masthead.

When the sun disappeared, it took with it all the warmth and color, leaving an empty, austere world in which endless rows of grave mounds seemed oppressively

## *Funny Pictures*

conspicuous. The lift and roll of the ship told me that we were out beyond the river's mouth and over Taku Bar. From now on there would be little beyond sea and sky until we reached the Inland Sea, and I might as well unpack, I decided. I had yet to face my roommate, too.

*Miss Minerva Penny* read the namecard outside the cabin door, and I smiled as I caught sight of the gaunt, forbidding figure in the cabin's solitary chair, Bible in hand, a tribute to the parental genius that had anticipated Miss Penny and given her a perfect name.

She did not look up as I entered, and I could see that though little short of sixty, her life of conviction, apparently untroubled by doubt or hesitation, had given her a prolonged lease on vigorous middle age. She wore the drab garments of her calling, having no vanity, I guessed, beyond the stern satisfaction of not being vain. I saw too that she had made good use of the time I had dawdled away on deck, as the only objects in the cabin she had not pre-empted were the upper bunk and the tumbler that contained my flowers.

I spoke to her, murmured my name, but for a full minute there was no response. I could feel the anger rising and thought longingly of B'rer Fox's tactics with the Tar Baby under similar provocation as she flicked her eyes in my general direction, rapped out a clipped "Howjado" and returned to her Bible undisturbed.

I turned and fled. Cravenly I left her in undisputed possession of the terrain, and sought the bar and the sym-

## *Paradox Isle*

pathetic company of Polly and her husband, who by that time were filled with Old Fashioneds and a fine crusading spirit.

"How are you and Minnie Mouse making out?" Polly called to me gaily, and when I told them, they were suitably indignant.

"We'll tick her off properly, if you say the word."

But I said no, anything for peace. Kobe was only four days away, and I could spend my waking hours on deck.

"If the weather's foul, we'll take refuge here," they said as though the prospect pleased them.

"Oh, the weather is always perfect at this time of year." An assurance I was to recall with wry amusement later.

But the first two days were perfect. It was not until we sighted the pale, bare coastline of Korea that the sunlight changed from gold to sickly sulphur yellow, the wind rose in strong fitful gusts and all the mirrors hid themselves behind a steamy mist. There was a sudden stir and bustle throughout the ship and the crew that slipped past us on the deck were clad in oilskins, for rushing toward us through the China Sea was a typhoon, unseasonably late, that had strayed from its winter quarters near the Loochoo Islands.

When the signs of its approach could no longer be ignored, the timid travelers went below to ply their poker-faced cabin boys with futile questions. The "old hands" remained on deck with a fine show of defiance.

"August is the time for this damn thing," they grum-

## *Funny Pictures*

bled, tucking their flapping steamer rugs beneath their feet. "‘October all over’ the old saying goes. Let me get back once to God’s country where the seasons stay put and don’t sashay all over the calendar like this."

When the first yellow roller swept the deck and the *Choko Maru* shuddered apprehensively, they too went below and the ship buried her blunt nose in the next wave, and settled to her grim task of riding out the storm.

At bedtime I staggered to the cabin to find Miss Penny’s austere garments swinging with dissolute abandon, but Miss Penny did not care. Lying on her face across the bunk she was as oblivious to my presence as usual but this time it was not deliberate. Like her reverend colleague, the bishop in *South Wind*, poor Miss Penny was "confoundedly sick." There was no stewardess aboard; so I made her as comfortable as I could and the fact that she suffered it without protest showed that she had reached the depths that theologians call the third degree of humility.

We plunged about well off our course, while bells rang incessantly from the bridge and were echoed by hoarse voices bellowing orders to the crew. What little we had to say was shouted to make ourselves heard above the thunder of the waves and the crash of breaking crockery. Hardest of all to endure were the smells, phantoms of forgotten meals thickly spiced with pickled *daikon* and fried fish, that emerged to wander through the passages and accounted for more casualties on the passenger list than did the sea.

## *Paradox Isle*

When the storm finally released its hold, it was with terrifying suddenness. One moment we were nose-diving into a wave and almost the next breath found us gliding on with hardly a tremor into quiet waters. For the first time since the typhoon struck I was really frightened, and for the first time Miss Penny raised her head and spoke.

"What's happened now?" she croaked. "Are we resting on the bottom?"

Fearing what it might disclose, I mopped the steam from the port and looked out upon a dark headland strung with twinkling lights looming against the sky.

"Shimonoseki!" It rang out like a war whoop as I fell to work on the salt-crusted screws.

"Shimonoseki," Miss Penny echoed, breathing the word as though it were a prayer of thanksgiving. "We've reached the Inland Sea at last."

The cool night air rushed into the frowsty little room, bringing all the reassuring smells of solid earth, and they brought Miss Penny forth like Lazarus.

"D'you know," she said doubtfully, "I honestly believe I'm a bit peckish. Could I get a cup of tea?"

## 2

From then on it was literally plain sailing. The weather, as though to make amends for its cantankerous interlude, was warm and bright and the lilac waters of the Inland Sea showed only the ripples from our passing.

## *Funny Pictures*

Miss Penny too had mellowed after her fashion and evinced a prickly sort of gratitude much as she might have tendered a dubious cactus plant for my acceptance.

Bolt upright among her pillows and clad in the most uncompromising of black kimono, Miss Penny liked to start discussions designed to draw me out because, she said, this was the first time in her life she had ever talked with an American. It was also the first vacation she had allowed herself in over thirty years.

"I've never cared to leave my work before," she explained. "And I would not have taken time off now but for the fact I need money to finance a great undertaking. My brothers, who own rubber plantations in Ceylon, are well able to provide the funds, so I went down to talk it over. It was quite an experience for me to be in a large family of young people — English girls and boys, I mean."

"But a very happy one," I suggested.

"Quite. Quite." Miss Penny agreed, but her tone lacked warmth, and after a visible struggle with her habitual reserve she went on. "I was horrified to hear the stories the young people told, the topics they discussed in mixed company. I give you my word! The jokes they bandied about, under the impression that such vulgarity was humorous — I shall be thankful to get back among clean-minded, decorous Japanese, I can tell you."

"Oh, I don't know," I objected. "I think it is largely a question of what you are accustomed to. I took some Eng-

## *Paradox Isle*

lish friends to the Kabuki theatre, and the comedy we saw was distinctly bawdy. They were so shocked I had to take them out, leaving all the nice Japanese ladies around us simply convulsed with mirth."

"Really!" Miss Penny managed to put a world of scepticism into the one word. "I'm sure I can't say because I have never been inside a Japanese theatre."

I remembered also the diary of an outraged Victorian who had been so disgusted by the conversation of the Japanese nobility — the statesmen with whom he was negotiating — that he "refused to besmirch the pages of the journal by recording them."

"Did you ever read the *Journal of Townsend Harris*?" I asked Miss Penny, but she shook her head.

"I never heard of him," she said. "Who was he?"

"You wouldn't, of course. He was an American. Our first ambassador to Japan." I let it go at that because I thought Miss Penny quite fanatical in her unqualified admiration for the Japanese, an attitude that is common enough among a certain type of missionary but difficult to reconcile with her dry humor that must cause the brethren uneasiness at times, if she permitted it to penetrate the gray and barren uplands of her mission work. But her devotion to the Japanese was transparently sincere, though she showed none of the cringing servility that usually goes with it.

The "great undertaking" for which she had begged money from her family, and upon which she had staked

## *Funny Pictures*

everything, was the hope and belief that Christianity would prove to be the salvation of the Japanese Empire. It alone could fill a great and growing need among the educated classes.

This interested me because I had assumed that religion was the result of temperament. Being based on faith and not on evidence, a man would adopt a creed that fitted his requirements and expressed him as no other could. Buddhism seemed best suited to the Japanese, primarily because it had originated in the East.

Miss Penny would have none of it, and like a good polemist, she had her reasons pat. Western education and ideals, she declared, had bred in the Japanese a craving for something more substantial than the gentle Buddhist precepts based on negation. They demanded stronger spiritual food — a religion with strict canons of belief and a definite ethical code.

"Their code of ethics is laid down for them by the state," she argued. "It is a social canon only, with no bearing on religious principles. That's all Shintoism is anyway — a man-made affair based on political expedience. It's not good enough."

"But Miss Penny, do you seriously expect Japan to repudiate her gods for Christianity?" It seemed to me fantastic. "And when, if ever, will the time be ripe?"

"It is now or never." She spoke with passionate insistence, and I saw that the knuckles on her clenched hands were as livid as though the bones themselves

## *Paradox Isle*

showed through. "Today Japan stands at the crossroads, and Christianity alone will save her from drifting back into stagnant isolation, or from the army that is pushing her into something infinitely worse." After a moment she added softly, "All we need now is an acknowledged leader."

I had heard Viscount Kaneko say the same thing some years before, and coming from a Japanese, it had impressed me.

"Are you going to undertake it?" I asked.

"Don't be absurd. No woman could. And only a Japanese could lead them, one who was well born. Emperor worship has so permeated their ideas that the illiterate people find Christ's humble birth an obstacle to faith. Their leader would have to be a scholar too — well versed in Western culture beside their own. A man of saintly life . . ."

"What about Kagawa?" I interrupted, then saw the light. "How stupid. You were describing someone you knew well, of course."

She nodded absently, as though my words had reached her in some remote region of her own, and her eyes were focused on a distant goal.

"I know him well. For years we have worked together toward this end. Japan's salvation lies in his hands, I think, together with my own."

I was silent, impressed by her earnestness and zeal, yet quite certain that her enthusiasm had carried her be-

## *Funny Pictures*

yond the bounds of sober judgment. People like Miss Penny who deliberately cut themselves off from their own race for years seem to lose all perspective for a time, and the awakening when it comes is very painful. I was thinking of Lafcadio Hearn as I sat there, and the bitter disillusionment that poisoned the last years of his life in Japan. On the other hand, I argued, Miss Penny must know something of the people among whom she spent her life, and the one fact that she shared a spiritual experiment with them should bring them very close.

"Would you care to meet my model Christian, Baron Kimura?" Miss Penny's tones were casual, but her eyes were intent and anxious. "You would be more impressed by him, and it might give you more vision about the Japanese. He lives near my mission at Odarumi, within easy reach of Tokyo. I could send you a chit, or would it bore you?"

"I should appreciate it very much," I told her. "It isn't every day one meets the leader of a crusade."

### 3

Miss Penny's parting words reminding me of my promise were soon crowded into that vague limbo of shipboard engagements by the immediate need to make my house more habitable for the winter. Each succeeding season requires special preparations if one wants to live with any sort of comfort in a Japanese house.

The pearl-colored lanterns, the windbells and bam-

## *Paradox Isle*

boo shades that had lent the place an illusion of space and coolness when I had left it for Peking in the full summer heat, now looked both chilly and forlorn. So, the rugs came out of storage and were laid down on the mats, heavy curtains were hung where glass doors ran the length of the house, and ungainly stoves dragged in from the "big-thing-place" and set up in every room. Pictures are often changed with the season too, a habit we have borrowed from the Japanese. A scroll, showing Chinese ladies gossiping in a pleasure boat among flowering lotus, was taken from the *tokonoma* and in its place I hung a painting of two white eagles in a gnarled pine tree, mounted on dull red brocade.

When Miss Penny's note arrived the place was in fair order, and armed with her map I set out through the maze of unmarked streets between me and the country road leading to her mission. Baron Kimura had invited us to high tea on Wednesday next, she wrote. She hoped I had not changed my mind or made other engagements for that date, and remained mine faithfully, Minerva Penny.

Once outside the city, the road led on through sunlit ricefields that seemed to lie under a deep spell. There were no workers harvesting the grain, and I recalled that it was the *Kanname-sai*, the autumn festival when the Emperor offers the first rice of the year to the Shinto harvest gods at the shrine of the imperial ancestors and everybody lays aside their work to celebrate. The thud of water wheels on every farm, like the steady pulse of the

## *Funny Pictures*

land itself, and the repeated cry of the *uzura*, whose fretful, high-pitched song was much admired by the effete members of the Tokugawa court, alone broke into the enchanted silence of the countryside.

The mission itself stood on rising ground, and I was ushered into a gaunt barrack of a house by a small country girl whose round red cheeks blanched with alarm at the sight of an unknown foreigner. Thrusting a chair toward me at arm's length, she breathlessly explained that the teacher would be with me shortly, her pupils were just leaving.

I could see them filing by the door, toothy, spectacled young men in dark students' uniforms, and I had a mild feeling of deflation because they looked so much more like a congress of earnest bus conductors than a class in Christian doctrine. Miss Penny's use of the Japanese word *deshi* instead of pupil, when she mentioned them, must have led me to imagine her facing a row of silk-clad catechumens, as *deshi* implies so much more than a mere pupil, a disciple really, more like Kipling's *Kim*. The room too, like others of its kind, would have been disappointing had it not been for the magnificent stretch of country it commanded.

The valley below was already filled with deep blue shadows through which the Tama River's course was traceable by lines of pale gold willows on its banks. The encircling hills were still suffused with hazy sunlight and stood out in clear warm tones of amber, gold, and rust.

## *Paradox Isle*

Against the sky, the ancient monastery that crowned Takao-san held its winged roofs high above the treetops, as though eternally poised for instant flight. On the winding road below were a line of wagons loaded with chrysanthemums for the flower markets in Tokyo. The carters strode at their horses' heads, proud of their caravan with its variegated tribute for the capital, and in place of the customary lantern, each man held a candle inside a paper bag to protect it from the wind with the sides frilled out like an old-fashioned "nosegay."

It might have been an autumn scene in any land, I remarked to Miss Penny, except for those random touches of the East that lent it both color and romance but changed its character entirely.

"It is what I suspect the Japanese do to Christianity. Why should they treat it differently from any other thing they have taken from the West? They reject certain parts outright, and adapt what they accept to their own peculiar needs with astonishing results sometimes. In all your years among them, has nothing ever cropped up — Oriental and unchristian — to throw you for a loss?"

I thought Miss Penny hesitated but her answer was a flat denial. "Today you will have a chance to convince yourself," she told me impatiently. "You'll find these people exactly like any Christian family of their class in your country or in mine. Come now, we must not keep them waiting. Our rickshas are outside."

## *Funny Pictures*

### 4

It was indeed a delightful family that made us welcome presently. The Baron, very dignified in his robes of lustreless black silk, came out and led us into the living room where his pretty daughters in their bright kimono were grouped about their mother like some particularly pleasing flower arrangement. "We wear our native dress in our Japanese house," the host explained in his formal idiomatic English, "for sake of harmony, you know."

We sat on cushions around a low table of dark *shitan* wood and were given a variety of sweet cakes with our tea which was clear, hot and very refreshing. The Baron had traveled extensively, knew both London and New York and we talked easily, without the long, hollow silences which usually blight any association with the Japanese. And Miss Penny was enjoying her hour of triumph. Two red spots burned on her cheekbones and at some shrewd comment of the Baron's about a modern playwright, the look she shot me was almost sinful in its pride.

"You will think me very smallbrow," he was saying smilingly, "but I like best of all the Marx Brothers. They make me laugh so much." He almost choked in his attempt to describe their antics for Miss Penny's benefit. "I always say, if I can laugh with you then I am truly one of you. Do you not think?"

We hastened to agree that laughter was indeed a proof

## *Paradox Isle*

of perfect understanding, being the first thing to suffer when transplanted from its native soil.

"And your daughters," I suggested. "Do they enjoy the foreign plays and movies as much as you do?"

"Ha! A very different matter." His thin, high-bred face took on a look of most forbidding sternness. "My daughters have never seen a foreign film, and never will as long as they are in my house. Such degrading emphasis on sex, I do not condone. They have not been exposed to such contamination."

My expression of chagrin brought Miss Penny to the rescue by asking his advice about some mission business, leaving me free to look about and enjoy the beauty of the room. Its fine proportions were unmarred by heavy furniture and the grain and finish of the woodwork made it gleam like heavy watered silk. There was an image of the goddess Benten in the *tokonoma*, a scroll of elegant calligraphy and a few rust-colored chrysanthemums arranged with subtle perfection in a bronze crescent moon.

The Baron was evidently giving Miss Penny some excellent advice, and I could imagine what his support must mean in a country where women are at such a disadvantage in administrative positions. When the problem was finally disposed of he turned to me in comical dismay.

"What must our guest here think of us, Penny-san? We talk so long of serious things she must fear we never

## *Funny Pictures*

laugh. I must make amends and show her my *warai e* — they make all people laugh so much.”

I asked what *warai e* might be, and from a concealed cupboard he took a flat book bound in heavenly brocade.

“Funny pictures you call them,” he said. “And these are a family treasure — two hundred thirty-eight years old.” He turned the book so I would open it correctly and handed it to me with a bow, his fine face beaming in anticipation of the treat in store for me.

I laid the book on the table so everyone could share the fun, opened it eagerly and gazed transfixed at the most indecent picture I had ever seen. The shock was so great that my first impulse was to laugh, but gulping it down, I hastily turned the page, thinking there must be some mistake. The next picture was worse than the first, if such a thing were possible, and glancing wildly at Miss Penny for my cue, I found her looking at her Christian leader with an expression of such malignant hatred that her face was quite transformed. But that good man was innocently wiping tears of mirth from his eyes with a fine silk handkerchief; the children looked and fell back tittering; and even their mother, who up to now had been a dim gray shadow in the background, was politely concealing her amusement with her kimono sleeve. My own smile must have been a sort of horrid grimace as I turned page after page of the outrageous pictures, feeling sure that not even the fabled French postcards offered more lurid variations of a single theme.

## *Paradox Isle*

Had I alone been concerned I should have been amused by the incongruous tableau we must have presented, but it was no laughing matter for Miss Penny, and that one instant's revelation of what it meant to her had changed a mildly Rabelasian farce into a tragedy.

We stayed a little longer, but the conversation lacked its former easy give and take, and the Kimura family were well aware of it. With the sensitivity peculiar to their race, they felt that something had distressed their good friend Miss Penny, who was no longer like herself, and I could see that they were genuinely puzzled and disturbed. I realized too that we were no longer speaking English and that our visit had suddenly become just another call upon some Japanese; so when we took our leave Miss Penny thanked them in their own fashion, bowing deeply to each one in turn.

Silently we climbed into our waiting rickshas and rode off into the merciful darkness which would afford Miss Penny a little privacy at least in which to face the full bitterness of her humiliation and defeat. The lantern swinging from the ricksha's shaft cast a pale circle of light ahead, and I caught a gleam of water in the paddy fields and the sharp outlines of a *torii* marking the entrance to a wayside shrine.

We had the road to ourselves except for one little hand-cart piled high with household possessions. Its owner, a bent and wizened figure perched on top, shouted direc-

## *Funny Pictures*

tions in a cracked voice to his wife, who though as old and shriveled as himself, was harnessed to the cart and strained at the load like any pack animal. Neither the long day's trek nor the burden she bore had diminished her spirits in the least, for she managed to quicken her pace and keep abreast of us, chatting a little breathlessly, and parted with a cheery farewell when our paths diverged.

If only Miss Penny could find consolation among people of this sort, I thought. All around her were the Outcasts, the poor, the toilworn harried people of Japan who so sorely needed help that she could not fail to find reward among them. I went on remorsefully planning a new future for Miss Penny to offset my own miserable sense of guilt. For me, the episode was just another paradox to wrap up carefully in the day's impressions and add to my collection; but the expression I had surprised upon Miss Penny's face showed plainly that this was not the first setback of the kind that she had suffered among her Christians. No one would ever know what it must have cost her to thrust the knowledge out of sight and go steadily forward. Tonight, it had been my presence — a witness of her own race — that had forced her to admit defeat.

My taxi was waiting for me at the mission, and I stood in silence while Miss Penny mounted the steps slowly, as though old age had suddenly caught up with her. At the

## *Paradox Isle*

top she halted, and turned on me the same look of abhorrence with which she had regarded her model Christian family.

“Pray for me,” she said hoarsely. “Pray that someday I may conquer my hatred, my loathing for the Japanese.”

### 5

I never saw Miss Penny again, and had news of her only once. I was on the train bound for Nikko and had just arranged my bags in a manner calculated to prevent a large family of Japanese, complete with babies, baggage and perhaps a box of irritated bees from moving into my seat. One of the nurses from St. Mark's hospital hailed me from the vestibule and elbowed her way through the crowd to my barricade.

“Off for the holidays?” I asked her. “Or just another case?”

“A holiday for once,” she said, kicking off her shoes like a Japanese before she propped her feet on the opposite seat. “My case was considerate enough to die this morning so I could make this train. It doesn't often happen. Missionaries hang on to life as a rule. But this one didn't want to live, and put up no fight at all.”

“What was her name?” But I was sure I knew.

The nurse stared at me strangely. “How did you know it was a woman? I'm sure you've never heard of her — a queer old gal from the Odarumi mission. One of those

## *Funny Pictures*

who go off the deep end about the Japanese and have no truck with foreigners. Fanatically devoted to them everybody thought — but you never really know, do you? Fever is a strange thing. It brought out something that she'd probably hidden even from herself."

Then she told me that from the time they brought Miss Penny into the hospital until she died, she said only one thing, but she said it over and over again in a terrible, insistent whisper that grew hoarser and fainter with each failing breath.

"Oh, God, forgive me. I hate the Japanese. I *hate* the Japanese."

---

---

## CHAPTER IV

### *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

---

---

*"There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners.  
They hold up Adam's profession."*

*Hamlet*

---

#### 1

A profession whose prestige seems to be widely established is the gardener's. Here is another testimonial from a different land, from that redoubtable scholar of Spain's golden age, Fray Luis de Leon:

"As the earth renders faithfully what is entrusted to it and in its unchangeableness is stable and downright . . . so it seems to engender and to impress in the breasts of them that work it a peculiar goodness and simplicity of temper such as are found with difficulty in men of other kinds. . . ."

It is gratifying to have a private opinion upheld by such eminent authority, because I have always thought that the most noteworthy people Japan produces — after the women — are its gardeners. They have none of the women's vacuous meekness, which is difficult to cope

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

with at times. In fact, gardeners are the natural tyrants of that half of the world, exercising the same undisputed authority that famous chefs do in the West. Since 1932, when Japan elected to "recognize the independence of Manchuria," we have seen its upstart military dictators rise to power through terrorism and mass murder, and commit their country to an imbecile course of destruction, bringing privation and grief to its people. In contrast, its hereditary dictators, the gardeners, belong to a cult handed down through generations from father to son. They have maintained and increased their country's natural beauty, and have afforded much pleasure to the Japanese people, who love and value nature with a practical understanding beneath their outward display of vague, poetical longing. Watching the farmers at work, one has the impression of a race in close collaboration with nature, instead of the perennial struggle that land cultivation seems to mean to the white race.

Like all custodians of specialized knowledge, Japanese gardeners are stubborn and arbitrary, and the only time that my wishes prevailed when a disputed point arose was in the matter of spider webs. The spiders themselves were revolting enough, a venomous lot, but the elaborate designs they contrived overnight were as decorative as anything in the garden. To old Takeo they simply meant shiftlessness and neglect, and their presence in his bailiwick caused him to lose face. He admitted that the spiders were "skillful," especially one ugly spin-

## *Paradox Isle*

ner that linked the crippled pine to the wisteria arbor with a great variety of patterns, all like exquisite thread-lace. When the first rays of sunlight touched them, thickly sequined with dew, the effect was breath-taking. Like dwarf bamboo, that shivers and rubs its slim leaves together fastidiously, the spider webs' fragile appearance was misleading, as I discovered the night a typhoon blew up when our crop was particularly showy.

For hours the storm raged through the town, flattening a wide path for itself through the crowded districts, uprooting whole avenues of stout trees. In those terrifying intervals between blasts, I could hear the surf towering in with a crash and a roar like thunder and earthquake combined. Once the house tottered sickeningly as the big wooden gate was torn from its hinges, driven against the front door, and held there as firmly as a postage stamp clings to an envelope.

When morning came, and a watery light filtered through the rushing cloud banks, I pushed back the wooden shutters to look out on an altered world. The whole contour of the beach had changed in the night; the surrounding hills showed raw gashes in their wooded flanks, torn by landslides which brought down with them the summer cottages that had stood in their ruinous paths; being no respecter of personages, the wind had demolished the fence enclosing the Crown Prince's villa. Around the house, the ground was a regular log-jam of

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

trees and broken branches. Someone's thatched roof had leapt the fence and sprawled drunkenly on the lawn. But the spider webs had held fast.

They were battered and soaked, with the drowned bodies of their designers and builders enmeshed in them, but those airy filaments swung dejectedly in the subsiding wind that sighed through the drenched remains of what had once been a garden.

### 2

Itinerant flower vendors too belong to a guild like that of the gardener and exercise the same benevolent despotism on behalf of their wares. Never once have I purchased a young tree or a shrub for a particular spot in the garden and succeeded in planting it there if the dealer did not approve. Once he had made a sale — and for a far better price than he could get from a Japanese — one might think that his interest in the transaction was ended. But not so. He would ask the address and deliver the tree in a handcart, trudging many a weary mile of steep cobbled roads to make certain that the ignorant foreigner planted his tree where it would do well.

For years I bought flowering plants from the same man, who opened the season at New Year's with a cartful of fragrant dwarf plum trees. And thereafter he appeared at intervals with pansies, azaleas, peonies, poppies and roses, reaching a climax in early July with his

## *Paradox Isle*

morning-glories, which were his specialty and his pride. The only flaw in this pleasant arrangement was the fact that he arrived with his wares just at daybreak.

After a very late night, when Suzuki appeared at dawn to say that the vendor was outside, I turned out, but in an odious humor.

Time means nothing to most Japanese because they can, and do, sleep at all hours and in any place when the urge overtakes them. In trains they weave tipsily back and forth to collapse with their heads resting on some stranger's shoulder. They squat down on a crowded street for a few moments, creating a small islet of repose in the midst of traffic; and I have seen errand boys standing beside their bicycles, sleeping soundly with their heads on the handlebars, using folded arms for a pillow.

By the time I had crawled into some clothes and out to the gate, I was grimly determined to put a stop to this practice for all time. But the sight of the vendor beaming with pleasure beside his cargo of lovely blossoms sent my ill humor flying and reduced the sharp protest I had planned to mild hint that he might come next time at a more reasonable hour.

"Condescend to forgive my rudeness, but with morning-glories one must start early," he explained. "I have been on the way since the Hour of the Ox (two a.m.), as the distance was great and I wanted the blooms to be perfect when they arrived. They are so young," he went on, his eyes moist with paternal affection, "and it is their first

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

trip from home. I must pass through the city streets while they are still dark and quiet so my *asagao* will not be frightened and wither before they arrive."

Suzuki looked at me doubtfully. "It is nonsense," she said, "but this one believes it. How many plants will the *okusan* want?"

Looking them over, I knew what the Jesuits mean by "the anguish of choice." It seemed little short of sacrilege to separate a few from the mass, as they had been placed so the delicately tinted blossoms blended gradually into those of deeper tone, but the same color, like music that begins softly to rise in a splendid crescendo. Pale pink flowers — the size of dessert plates — made way for a soft terra-cotta that the Japanese call Danjuro after their famous actor whose chosen color it was. I had never seen fuchsia morning-glories before, but there they were and a splendid foil for the ruby-red blossoms beside them. Next came the scale of blues, from flowers like a gleam of winter moonlight to deep cobalt bordered with white. But at sight of the lilac and deep purple shades, I abandoned the struggle.

"I take them all," I said desperately. "We'll make room for them somewhere. But first, give the flower man his breakfast, Suzuki-san."

Not a grain of rice would the vendor consider until his youthful charges had been comfortably installed in their new home. He planted them in long boxes, with a critical eye for the color scheme, sprinkling them with fertilizer

## *Paradox Isle*

mixed in cold water and, as the sun was high by that time, he covered them with a tent of damp newspapers.

While he was hard at work, an idle impulse made me turn on the phonograph. The first notes brought him to the door stone, looking stern-faced.

Would I condescend to stop the loud music? The morning-glories were young, he begged to remind me. They had traveled far and now that they were settled and fed they must sleep. Not until sunset should there be any noise in the garden. He would speak to Suzuki-san about keeping the dogs quiet.

### 3

My gardener, old Takeo, was also a fixture, having attached himself to the house after he had come as a burglar to rob it. Far from showing discomfiture at this novel introduction, his one wild oat was a source of great pride, and after the foray he calmly took charge of the place, appearing at regular intervals to plant or prune or just talk to Suzuki for as long as she would put up with him.

His heaviest duties came in the fall when he prepared the garden to face the iron frosts of the Big Cold. He started betimes, when the trees were still in full leaf, when only a fugitive gleam of scarlet showed in the maples, and the borders were gay with dahlias and late roses. The old pine trees were his first care in case of an early snowfall. With fingers as gnarled and twisted as the roots of the tree itself, he supported each separate

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

twig by a length of twine and fastened the other end to a stout pole above. When he had finished, it looked as though one of his detested spiders had been spinning there through the night.

The plum tree, being old, was given elaborate pantaloons of straw; but the camellias and the japonica were merely provided with leggings, as they were sturdy plants and would bloom valiantly in the snow; even the stone lantern had a bonnet of the same material tied under its uncompromising chin; and the place looked as though it had been disguised for some freakish masquerade.

As he worked, Takeo droned along with the saga of his brief fling at crime, until the dogs too seemed to know it by heart and came in at all the right places with sympathetic tail thumpings.

For many moons after his illness the year before, he began, he had been without work, with little food and a shelter in no way adequate for an ailing old man. His clothing too would not hold together much longer, although he labored over the gaping rents with failing eyesight and unaccustomed hands. "*E to*, it is easily seen I'm no tailor," he sighed. "I must to my own job," as though there was work to be had for the asking. Collecting all the discarded newspapers lying about, Takeo went over them thoroughly in the hope that someone would advertise for a gardener, and occasionally someone did.

Then Takeo would tear off that bit of the paper, stow

## *Paradox Isle*

it away with care in his empty tobacco pouch, pull the torn paper doors of his house together behind him and set out in quest of work. In the summer, these trips were very pleasant indeed. The early morning mists lent the country the soft witchery of a fairy tale, and the dust of the highroad was cool and smooth underfoot. Takeo padded along contentedly, first taking care that the hem of his faded kimono was tucked in his girdle to ensure greater comfort on his journey and a decent appearance on his arrival.

He loitered a little near the more prosperous farmhouses that stood back from the road in a protecting grove of pines, hoping that someone might share an early meal with him. Or he stood enchanted beside vast fields of lotus while raised on tall clean stems the buds opened to the light, his hunger forgotten at sight of this morning oblation to the sun.

The first warmth of the day brought people out on the road and into the fields. Barelegged coolies, sidling along with their edgewise gait, called hoarse greetings and sang snatches of rude verse; and in the rice paddies, figures in faded blue straightened themselves under wide hats to reply. Takeo enjoyed all this good fellowship after his solitary hours at home.

Winter followed inevitably. Only now and again someone wanted a gardener, someone in the deep country which meant long trips on unprotected roads where icy rains beat down upon him, and bitter winds cut him to the

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

bone. Often he arrived at his destination so exhausted that the servants, seeing his blue lips and shaking limbs, brought him in to dry his clothes at their brazier. They gave him bowls of scalding tea and scraps of food left over from their own bountiful meals which he consumed with rasping gulps, ever mindful of his manners.

Squatting around him in a circle, they waited considerably for him to finish before they questioned him about himself and his present poor estate. Patently he was no uncouth *lumpen* in spite of his rags. He ate his food with the right amount of genteel commotion, giving it full attention as etiquette demanded. Over a pipeful of tobacco he answered them willingly enough, telling of his misfortunes and his search for work. They nodded sympathetically.

Had the Old One no sons to provide for him? It was indeed pitiful that he was left alone in his age and partial blindness. Why not apply to this or that charitable organization for help?

To Takeo the tea was warm and consoling until this talk of charity turned it to gall on his lips. He fumbled in his girdle for the tobacco pouch, extracting the crumpled piece of newspaper. To prove he was no object of charity, he read them the advertisement, explaining that he had come there by request to offer them the benefits of his poor skill.

More tea was brewed and another pipeful of tobacco given him to delay the time when they must tell him that

## *Paradox Isle*

his trip had been quite fruitless. A strong, a younger man was needed for the work.

Takeo smiled steadily as he rose and thanked them for their food and courtesy. No hint of his disappointment marred the ceremonious farewell, and he limped out into the storm to face the return journey and the bleak discomfort of a fireless house.

### 4

It took several such trips to convince Takeo that he must abandon hope of any work before the spring at least. His situation was desperate, for he was seventy-five and in frail health, with spring a long way off. He had no other trade beside his skill with trees and flowers, and now the penalties of old age — poverty and illness — were closing in upon him. For the first time he faced the prospect of starvation.

From habit he stooped and gathered up an old newspaper clinging forsakenly to a bamboo fence. It was useless to look at the "help wanted" column, but the stories of recent successful robberies made cheerful reading for a lonely old man. Clearly the police were too occupied with rebellious schoolboys and the menace of their dangerous thoughts to protect private property, and at this a bold idea darted into his mind, bringing him to his feet with the paper crushed between his hands. He would be a burglar. It was the only solution to his difficulties. No one of his respected calling could accept charity without

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

losing face, but he could and would — with honor — become a burglar. No training was needed for this career, as children were known to be accomplished thieves.

Takeo smoothed out the bedraggled paper once again, and guided by the wealth of detail in the various accounts, his purpose hardened into practical considerations and definite plans. With neither food nor fire in the house his first attempt could not be made too soon, and he knew a good place to rob also.

Last winter, after his long illness, a foreign lady offered him light work indoors for which she overpaid him foolishly; so her house would be both suitable and safe for his maiden effort.

From underneath a heap of broken flowerpots, Takeo unearthed a rusty pruning knife, sole relic of his one-time profession. He wasted no time in sentimental memories of hours spent in sunny gardens, but fired with his new idea, he sharpened the blade into a formidable weapon, trying its razor edge upon his thumb with the harsh tang of his peasant cruelty.

Next came the question of disguise, though it seemed hardly necessary as he had never heard of a burglar being molested by the police in any way. In this case, however, it would be impolite to appear without one, as the lady he meant to rob knew him by sight. The prospect of using his knife upon her if the need arose presented no difficulties to his mind, but it would be most unseemly if the foreign lady recognized him as a burglar. She might

## *Paradox Isle*

think he had not appreciated her kindness, which was not so. Gratitude surged up in Takeo as he reflected that thanks to her, he now knew her house well enough to rob it. He resolved to spare her the pain of recognition if it lay within his power.

With a bit of charcoal ground to powder in a bowl of water, he concocted a sticky paste which he smeared liberally, if unevenly, over his mild old countenance. The results were all that any desperado could have asked, and Takeo was delighted. Already he was showing great aptitude for his new profession.

He was still elated when he set out on foot for the house of his intended victim. The evening was drawing into a bitter night, and he met no one on the way but a wretched dog that whined at his heels for companionship. Sensing the old man's preoccupation, it slunk away into the shadows after a block or so. A little before midnight, shaken with his mounting excitement, Takeo stood before the house, and seeing that it was hospitably darkened, slipped through a gap that he remembered in the hedge.

It was a night of brilliant stars, and by their light he observed with real distress the shocking condition of the garden. The chrysanthemums, for instance, would never bloom planted as they were. Even a foolish foreigner should have known that they should be on the other side of the house. Perhaps there would be time to transplant them before he began his new trade, as it was still many hours to sunrise.

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

Irresolute, he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other as he rallied himself sternly to the work in hand. But the appeal of the scrubby plants proved too potent to withstand, and, whipping out his pruning knife, the old gardener went to work swiftly and efficiently.

Humming contentedly, he padded back and forth with the chrysanthemums, planting them close enough for sociability but not too near for comfort when they should have reached full growth. He pressed the loose earth down about the roots and sniffed the acrid fragrance of the few straggling buds with the assurance that now they had a chance to become full, fine blooms.

With a clear conscience he could begin his evening's work, and wiping his knife on the short, dry grass, he stepped lightly inside the house. As he had expected, it was a simple matter to gain entrance, as foreigners were mad enough to sleep with their windows open.

A dim light was burning in the kitchen, and thither Takeo made his way, successfully avoiding all of the ungainly objects with which a foreigner clutters up his house.

Someone had eaten a late meal, for the careless *amah* had left a plate piled high with food. But more exciting still, she had gathered up the ashtrays, and many a moon had come and gone since Takeo had seen so much good tobacco. Gathering these treasures greedily into a square of white cloth, Takeo tucked them securely in his girdle before he fell upon the food. Perched precariously upon

## *Paradox Isle*

the kitchen stool, he ate everything in sight: rice with meat beside it, with peanuts, pickled ginger and shredded fish in soy sauce. He drank the heeltaps of warm beer remaining in the bottles, and presently a lovely glow spread over him. Why had he not thought of this before? Takeo belched politely as he thought of his wasted youth.

When the last scrap of food had vanished he raised his head and drew a great breath of repletion. It caught midway, however, and as he rose unsteadily, frozen with terror, his knees swayed under him, working both ways. Across the room a devil was watching him — a fiend with a hideous black face and slits of eyes.

With the memory of his disguise, the blood flowed back into his paralyzed limbs, and he sank down reassured but not relieved.

*Oya ma* — what a face! Even a robber should not be so filthy. If anyone should find him with such an evil look they might mistake him for some low-class thief.

Not wishing to frighten anyone who chanced to see him, Takeo rose and walked firmly through the house and to the bath beyond. The water in the wooden tub was still hot, he found on lifting up the cover. A thin but reassuring vapor rose from it into the cool air as he stripped off his shabby clothes. He sniffed suspiciously at the scented soap, but was obliged to use it for lack of any other.

It would be a shame to spoil such nice clean bath water. Had he not eaten the foreign lady's food, and had she not

## *Ancient Gentlemen of Japan*

showed him kindness? But in such a loud voice and strange Japanese that his heart became small at her approach. Seizing the little wooden bucket, he plunged it deep into the water and sluiced himself off before he went to work upon his grimy face. He scrubbed so vigorously that the soap slipped from his hand now and again, but not until he had been assured of his success by the condition of the small white towels, did Takeo step into the tub.

With a sigh he sank into the water, which smelled deliciously of clean, resinous wood. Well fed, warm for the first time in months, he crouched there like some drowsy sea animal, soaking and nodding. The light overhead struck a spark from the copper stove at the end of the tub, which winked companionably at him. How splendid crime could be, he reflected happily, and otherwise forgetful of his enterprise, Takeo the burglar propped his chin on the edge of the tub and slept.

It was dawn when he awoke. The wooden *amado* of the servant's room next door was pushed back with a great clatter, jarring the old man into frantic activity as he realized where he was and why. How different a criminal career seemed in the cold steely light of a rising day.

Before he could do more than rise stiffly to his feet, the door opened and Suzuki stood there eyeing him severely.

"Get out of that chilly water, Old One," she ordered with devastating calm. "And put on your kimono, unless you want the police to arrest you in your meat!"

## *Paradox Isle*

### 5

At this point the story broke off abruptly. For some reason the old man never dwelt on what had followed, although it had apparently worked out well for him. I startled him once by asking him why this was, and waited until his bows had diminished in number and depth for his answer.

“None but a fool dwells willingly on his failures in life,” he said sadly. “After showing so much promise at first as a burglar, I completely forgot to steal anything!”

---

---

## CHAPTER V

### *Churchy-san—Number-One Christian*

---

---

*"Only since God doth often make  
Of lowly matter for high uses meet,  
I throw me at His feet;  
There will I lie until my Maker seek  
For some mean stuff on which to show His skill.  
Then is my time."*

GEORGE HERBERT

---

#### 1

**I**n the spring of 1940, the Education Ministry, with characteristic lack of humor, issued a decree stating that Christianity would be tolerated in Japan only so long as it conformed with the "new order in East Asia." I have wondered how it affected Churchy-san, our number-one Christian, as her religion was a simple, one-man affair, concerned only with the welfare of humanity, untouched by politics, by creed or by controversy. Any task that was too disagreeable or dangerous for others, Churchy-san gladly performed as her routine "Christian duty," which

## *Paradox Isle*

is hardly attuned to what I have seen of Japan's co-prosperity sphere.

Churchy-san joined the household as a sort of auxiliary, to take over the duties that Nobu's bulk made impossible. It had required a series of comic mishaps to convince Nobu that she could no longer squeeze her way around the dining-room table without courting disaster, but she finally capitulated.

"Well then, shall I find an *amah* or would you rather work with a friend?" I asked her, and she tearfully begged permission to find her own substitute. To a valued friend only would she relinquish the joy of serving my guests; of hearing them make the joke; make the laugh; and of seeing for herself how they enjoyed the "feast" she had prepared.

After this conversation weeks passed with no sign of an applicant nor, in true Japanese fashion, was the subject ever referred to. Nobu had proved herself adept on several occasions at the sort of passive resistance which is often more effective than force, and I had decided to take matters in hand, when one day she filled the doorway.

"That one who will take my place in the dining-room is outside," she announced. "Condescend to excuse the delay, but I could not find her before." Stepping aside, she made way for a girl in a clean, much-darned kimono, who crept into the room with the humble air of an old-fashioned Japanese and bowed to the floor.

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

"How is she called?" I asked, somewhat at a loss to acknowledge the introduction of one whose face is pressed to the matting.

"She also is Nobu, so we must call her Chachy-san to avoid the confusion."

"Very well. Chachy-san is a new Japanese name to me."

Apparently Nobu found this amusing, but she repeated the name again, clearly and slowly as she might to a backward child.

"Chachy-san. No name, *okusan*. She is number-one Christian." Gazing with pride at her candidate Nobu added: "She knows well the Christian duty."

"Churchy-san!" Light dawned at last. "But does she know how to serve foreigners? That is more important to me than her Christian duty."

"Have no anxiety," Nobu assured me. "Chachy-san knows to help in all ways beside the front door and the table. She can make the soups and roastings, the sauce to pour over many dish, the salad oil and other American desires. Besides the repair to cloths she does the press of suit. She has *seen* the drink," Nobu finished doubtfully, "but does not know the mix. If the *okusan* will condescend to show her, soon she can think the mix."

I promptly volunteered to undertake "the mix" in deference to possible Christian scruples, and at the sound of her new name Churchy-san lifted her head from the floor and smiled shyly. She was a rangy country girl, tall for

## *Paradox Isle*

a Japanese, with quantities of shiny black hair, a healthy color and large white teeth that were unadorned by the much coveted gold fillings.

"Then that's settled. Does Churchy-san know she is to come every evening at six?"

"She understands. The shop where Chachy-san works all day closes at six and she will come here. The extra money will help with her Christian duty."

In the days that followed, Churchy-san proved to be all that Nobu had claimed, and the place began to look as it had before Suzuki went on her vacation. The only flaw in an otherwise perfect arrangement was the girl's extreme shabbiness, which was odd in view of the fact that I had provided her with plenty of clothes. After one wearing, I noticed that each new kimono vanished forever and Churchy-san came to work in a garment as threadbare as that she had worn on arrival. Rather than embarrass so timid and faithful a creature by asking about them, I took counsel with Nobu.

"Where are Churchy-san's new kimono? She must not wear her old rags in the house."

Nobu hesitated, selecting from the truth what she intended to tell me. "It is the only one," she said finally. "Chachy-san gave the others away."

"What made her do that?"

"The Christian duty," and Nobu lowered her voice mysteriously as though imparting a secret formula.

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

“What is this Christian duty?” I insisted, and Nobu wrestled with unaccustomed thought, shifting her weight from one foot to another.

“I am not the Christian,” she said apologetically, “and do not know well. But Chachy-san says that the Christosama met a young *daimiyo* in a teahouse one day and told him to sell all he had — his kimono, his fine silk *haori* and *hakama* — and give the cash to the poor. Chachy-san was not there, but later she hears. Well then, every evening the master of Chachy-san’s shop pays her what she earns in the day. She finishes here, then she goes to all the bridges in town where the poor ones take shelter, having no place to sleep. To them she gives all her clothes and her money.”

I was silently digesting this when Nobu went on in a livelier tone, evidently more sure of her ground: “The master of Chachy-san’s shop is a widower. He wishes to make her his ‘second one,’ but he fears the people would say what fashion of wife is this who steals her own husband’s clothes? He would lose face. He asked the promise of Chachy-san about this, but she thinks that one who has much must share with those who have nothing. This promise she does not give, so . . .” A vast shrug intimated that the harried shopkeeper’s romance remained at stalemate.

“Churchy-san is still young, she should keep some pretty things for herself. Isn’t she sometimes too tired to

## *Paradox Isle*

walk around town all night after working hard all day?"

Nobu scrupulously searched her memory. "Never has Chachy-san spoken it," she said at last.

That summer the Sino-Japanese war broke out, bringing unexpected prosperity to most of Churchy-san's unwashed clientèle, but privation and sorrow to so many others that she did not miss her old standbys. Their places were filled by the children and wives of small tradesmen, of bus conductors and errand boys who had been whisked into uniform and marched off to war before they had time to dispose of their shops or provide for their families. So-called military relief was sternly and sparsely dispensed by the army, but it never reached the ignorant, destitute poor, the very people who needed it most. The majority of them had no means of knowing that such an organization existed, and had they been told, few would have mustered sufficient courage to make any appeal, as benevolence is the last thing the Japanese associate with a uniform.

Nobu informed me that the increased demand on Churchy-san's time and strength made that redoubtable Christian "*taihen* heppy." She was out and about with her bundles of clothing and food until all hours, till the pallid dawn spread over the stifling town and the cicadas awakened to begin their strident complaints. At the first muffled scrape of the gate the dogs would rise to their feet growling softly, listen a minute, then relax with a

## Churchy-san — Number-One Christian

sigh, and I knew it was Churchy-san, creeping back to her small, three-mat room for a few quiet hours before her shop opened at seven. She had picked up the Oxford Group slogan from some native enthusiast, and chanted *kyōdō, kyōdō, shimas, shimasho* — I share, I will share — in a muted, tuneless refrain as she went over the house “rearranging the dust.”

After a while I noticed that her Christian duty was taking her farther afield, that she was often away for days at a time. I was mildly irked, laying it to the hot weather, until Nobu returned one day from a fruitless trip to the shop and reported that Churchy-san would not be at work for some time. She was walking to Kobe.

“She has no right to go off like that,” I said crossly. “And in this heat too. It takes the fastest express train a good twelve hours for the trip.”

“Chachy-san walks very fast,” said Nobu soothingly. “She can reach there in less than a week.”

“But why go to Kobe when there are hundreds of people in Tokyo needing her help?”

Nobu looked about warily, making sure that no one was within earshot. “The *kempei tai*,” she whispered. “The military police,” her eyes round with dread at the name.

“Well, it’s none of their business,” I grumbled. “And they should be thankful that the soldiers’ families have someone to help them.”

“Since Chachy-san works here, she must not speak to

## *Paradox Isle*

the soldiers' wives," Nobu hissed, standing back to enjoy the effect of her statement. "The police say you send her to find out the military secret."

The idea of those anxious women being sources of strategic knowledge, when their only concern was if the next bowl of rice was forthcoming, proved too much for me, but Nobu was not amused.

"The *kempei* locked Chachy-san up and questioned her for three days. They say she must tell that you ask her the military secret. They speak you are the foreign spy."

"Oh, poor Churchy-san! Did they hurt her, or frighten her badly?" I knew that they would feel free to practice any brutality on a victim that was both poor and helpless.

"Of that she said nothing," Nobu replied. "She says the *kempei* are fools because they tell her the Christo-sama is also a foreigner when everyone knows He was Japanese — from the Hokkaido. 'From soldiers' wives you must away,' they tell her. 'And this money you save you must to the army for new aeroplanes.' But Chachy-san says if the Chinese all-time run away like the army tells, they need no new aeroplane. She is very angry that they speak lie of the Christo-sama and name you the spy. She does not give."

I might have anticipated something like that. "You should have told me," I said.

"Chachy-san forbids. The *okusan* is very quick angry and the police might make die of broken bones like that

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

foreign newspaper gentleman. Now she must make the Christian duty far away from the Tokyo *kempei tai*."

### 2

Returning from a six hundred mile walk in the Great Heat, Churchy-san found herself without occupation, as the harried shopkeeper-suitor had given up hope and hired a less erratic assistant. It reduced her field of activities to my small establishment, with the result that scarcely a fleck of dust clouded the woodwork; not a stray leaf nor a broken twig was allowed to litter the garden; and the dogs were bathed and groomed to a point where they hid under the house at the sound of Churchy-san's footstep. Although I spent both time and thought inventing tedious tasks for her, which she accomplished in a fine, silent frenzy, I could see that they were but poor substitutes for the Christian duty she had renounced and that Churchy-san was deeply unhappy.

Nobu clucked anxiously over the girl's altered looks — she seemed to be literally wasting away — and in desperation called her efficient corps of delivery boys to the rescue with orders to find something revolting and risky enough to restore Churchy-san to good spirits and the old-time spring to her step.

A Tokyo summer, though in some ways the most interesting of the seasons, is quite overpowering during the *Dōyō* or Greater Heat. The actual temperature is not high enough to produce this degree of prostration, but mois-

## *Paradox Isle*

ture, thick and oppressive, hangs over the earth, binding the treetops together with a wreath of blue mist, making the average European feel that he moves everywhere with his head in a hot metal casque.

On one of the worst of such days the grocery boy pedaled to the back door with news that shattered our afternoon stupor and stirred the household to subdued animation. The town was still gasping for breath with every lattice flung wide to anticipate the wraith of a breeze that mercifully followed the afternoon rains to flutter the leaves and shake a few tinkling notes from the windbells. The blinding white sunlight had not yet dimmed to pale amber, nor had the tall trees flung their screen of protecting shade over the house and garden, but I realized that Churchy-san, for the first time in weeks, was moving about, contentedly ringing the changes on "sharing"; Nobu had torn herself away from her electric fan; while the dogs, crawling out of the holes they had dug under the hedge, had returned to the house with an unmistakable air of expectancy. Whatever it was, I should hear in good time, or such parts of it as Nobu thought fit to disclose; but it was Churchy-san who finally appeared, trembling with some strong excitement, to ask if she might absent herself on a bout of Christian duty.

A family of *Eta* somewhere in Ikao — a hot-spring resort in the mountains — had been stricken with smallpox. The innkeepers and village authorities, dismayed by this threat to their season, had enforced an effective

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

quarantine by simply leaving the victims alone to live or die as their Karma decreed. Of what consequence, they asked, was the fate of a few wretched Outcasts, compared to the risk that their patrons might be alarmed into taking their wives or their *geisha* to some other mountain spa? No awkward questions would ever arise, as no one would dream of risking defilement by offering aid to Untouchables, they all agreed, little dreaming that someone was literally pining for just such a chance.

Churchy-san was so happy, viewing this calamitous venture as a heaven-sent boon, that I offered no more than the feeblest objection.

"Why don't you find out first if they still need your help?" I suggested. "They may all be dead by the time you arrive."

"Then, *okusan*, I must bury them, mark their graves and pray for their souls," she replied in the longest speech I had ever heard her make.

Within the hour she was off. A worn kimono or two, some candle ends for her lantern, and an extra pair of straw sandals were tied up in a square of bright cotton cloth with the packet of food Nobu had prepared for her and liberally salted with tears of unspoken protest. Long after her friend had disappeared in the smoky, blue twilight, Nobu stood at the gate gazing after her, and I suspected and shared her secret conviction that we had just looked our last on a really "number-one Christian."

Darkness brought little, if any, relief from the heat,

## *Paradox Isle*

and the sultry night seemed to throb with the soldiers' battle songs, high wild harmonies of simple folk who were close to the soil. Marching into the shrine next door, they paid their respects to General Nogi's spirit, the officers reciting a pledge of undying loyalty in harsh, staccato barks, and the massed voice of the men answered, as wordless and awful as the voice of the sea. Ignorant tribesmen they were, who firmly believed that ". . . the Imperial Army conquers whenever it attacks, wins wherever it engages in combat, in order to spread *Kodo* far and wide, so that the enemy may look up in awe to the August Virtues of His Majesty." Their highest reward was a chance to die for the Emperor, their personal happiness, human relationships, ambition, honor even, were trivialities compared to the sacred cause. What a shambles the world would be, I thought, if ever this huge irresponsible force were loosed against civilization.

Such reflections were hardly conducive to slumber, and I tried to shake off my misgivings by following Churchy-san on the first part of her journey. I imagined her leaving the clamorous city streets that seemed to rush at her, intent on annihilation, for the quiet country roads that stood back to await her arrival, where her lantern would cut a soft dusty path in the darkness ahead. She would sing as she marched, I felt sure, and the frogs in the paddy fields also would boom out *kyōdō*, *kyōdō suru* in time to the long swinging stride that was taking her into the mountains.

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

Not until the hot days grew shorter, followed by cooler nights, and the cicadas' rusty laments gave place to the silvery song of the crickets did Tokyo's foreign colony venture back from the mountains and seashore. The English made the usual dignified progress from Lake Chuzenji; the Americans poured in from Karuizawa where the season had been one long tennis tournament; and a mixed bag of nationals closed their beach cottages at Kamakura or Hayama, with a deep sun tan and a collection of sea-nettle bites to show for their summer.

October saw practically everyone back from home leave, bringing the newest gadgets, the latest slang to astonish us all, and clothes that destroyed, after one fevered glance at them, our own modest pride in the garments we had contrived during bitter and blasphemous sessions with Japanese tailors.

Still there was no sign from Churchy-san, and I asked Nobu's advice about making inquiries that would not involve the girl with the police, but her only reply was an outburst of loud, heaving sobs and a mute gesture toward her small kitchen shrine. I saw that a new *ihai* was standing among the other death tablets of Nobu's own family. It stood for someone who had recently died, as both tea and rice were set before it, and a pitifully shabby change purse of Churchy-san's told me that Nobu had abandoned all hope and was mourning her friend.

A few days after this I was awakened by a terrific commotion belowstairs. I listened amazed to the almost for-

## *Paradox Isle*

gotten sound of Nobu's gay laughter and to yelps of joy from the dogs who were hysterically running in circles. Then the house trembled on its flimsy foundations, the sliding doors rattled and the metal drawer handles joined them, beating out a rapid tattoo. Was it a real earthquake this time, I wondered, or just Nobu mounting the stairs?

"*Okusan*," her voice quavered joyously outside the door. "Chachy-san has returned. Now she bathes, next she must eat a great feast and then sleep — perhaps for three days." A program that was Nobu's idea of Nirvana.

"Chachy-san brings back the young man. She wishes to tell you. You must not be shocked because Chachy-san looks like a *bo-san* from the temple. Her hair is cut short."

Presently the number-one Christian came to pay her respects, haggard enough, but no longer ragged or ravenous, and obviously at peace with the world. She was completely engulfed in a huge white kimono of Nobu's, and did indeed look like a Buddhist priest. With her cropped head and exalted expression she might have posed for any famous ascetic — St. Nichiren on his mountain, John the Baptist after his forty-day diet of locusts, or the Mad Penitent of Todi. She seemed to have shed her painful timidity with her ragged kimono, and now wore, with the tent-like garment donned for this visit of ceremony, an air of gentle serenity. She was eager to tell her adventures because they had been astringent enough to satisfy her exacting ideal of Christian duty. Nobu acted as master of ceremonies, snatching at flying ends of the

## Churchy-san — Number-One Christian

narrative as it progressed, passing them on to me in simplified Japanese, so I could enjoy the full flavor. "The *okusan* wishes to hear *all*," she declared. "Now begin."

### 3

Obligingly Churchy-san took up the tale. She had hastened through the hot steamy Tokyo plain, past rice paddies alternating with stretches of lotus in bloom under their quivering canopy of blue dragonflies, and she soon reached the sloping mountain meadows, bright with harebells and fragile pink columbine. Sometimes the road plunged into forests of tall cryptomeria where the wind droned through the branches like deep organ notes.

At this point, every small object around us vibrated to Nobu's vast shudder. "It's a *samushii* sound in the night," she exclaimed.

Churchy-san looked at her and laughed. "Lonely?" she said. "*Bakarashii*. On the road there is always good company."

Soon she had caught up with a large band of pilgrims — old men and women — on their way to a mountain shrine, and for a day she had suited her pace to theirs, sharing their food and hearing the talk of many villages. At last, irked by their leisurely pace she had left them plodding along, obedient to their leader's bell, like a flock of docile old sheep. Next she joined a couple of jugglers who were making a tour of summer shrine festivals with a patient, moth-eaten bear, and the fourth day she sighted

## *Paradox Isle*

Ikao, a cluster of inns and thatched cottages that clung to the sheer mountainside.

Hunting up the police, she carefully explained her mission, asking where the Outcasts might be found. As she had foreseen, they met her request with blank faces, declaring that such a family had never existed. Not a look nor a gesture betrayed Churchy-san as she bowed to each man before turning away.

"Condescend to forgive my intrusion. I shall inquire now in the village where someone may know of this family with smallpox."

"Come back," they shouted, their official calm shattered. "We will examine the matter." Drawing away they consulted in low tones, rubbing their shaven polls to stimulate thought.

"One of us will take you to the house of the *Eta*," they told her. "To make sure you don't gab in the village. But you must not return, having been defiled. If you are crazy enough to risk death for these low-born *Suiheisha*,<sup>1</sup> it is your own affair, but do not expect any help."

Churchy-san beamed on them all. "What help I need my Okami-sama gives me," she told the astonished policemen, and set off for the village with her reluctant guide.

Ikao's main street — the *machi* — is no more than a flight of stone steps built into the mountain and flanked by souvenir shops that show minute figures cunningly

<sup>1</sup> Official term for Outcasts, meaning "below-water-level."

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

carved out of wood and lengths of kimono cloth dyed bright sulphur yellow in the local hot springs. Up and down this steep thoroughfare toil an endless procession of Japanese, who fill in time between their hot baths by making a tour of the shops and selecting *meibutsu*, small specialties of the place, to take home to their families.

The men wear the wadded kimono that all Japanese inns provide for their patrons. They stalk along in their truculent way, while their wives, clad like sedate little peahens, follow in dutiful silence. In contrast, the geisha are like brilliant birds with their intricate headdress and gorgeous kimono, and they walk abreast of their men, laughing and talking vivaciously.

Churchy-san had no eyes for the shifting colorful scene as she went from one shop to another with her surly conductor. By the time she had bought a large bale of charcoal she was so heavily burdened that the amiable vendor sent his *kozo* along to carry her packages, though the policeman stood by unencumbered, unwilling to help and risk loss of face.

"Aren't you through yet?" He growled like any man on a shopping tour the world over. "Only one more stop," Churchy-san promised, and disappeared in the barber shop where she asked in a shaking voice to have her head shaved.

With shears and clippers the barber made short work of Churchy-san's thick mane, and gathering up the long

## *Paradox Isle*

tresses, he presented them to her neatly bound with red cord.

"I can see that you hold with our old customs," he said approvingly. "This fine braid of hair will hang in the Haruna shrine so your man will return from the war. Many others have had the same pious thought. Is it not so, Honored Officer?"

Churchy-san bowed, letting the little man think what he pleased, and the policeman, who had been staring fixedly into his cap, merely grunted by way of reply.

Carefully skirting the town, the policeman led Churchy-san and the *kozo* out on a path that circled the face of the mountain and stopped abruptly before a shabby red shrine.

"From here you see the house well," he said, "from the shrine of the Horse God." And he bowed to the fine dappled hobbyhorse, straight from Matsuya's toy shop, that gazed at a small cup of rice and two copper coins laid before it.

"Why not store your provisions here in the shrine?" The *kozo* asked helpfully, opening a door in the rear. "I can place them high on the shelf so the rats cannot get them."

To show his authority the policeman said he must first examine the contents of each package, and poking about in his privileged way, he came upon Churchy-san's hair.

"What good is this," he wanted to know, "except to make a tail for the Horse God?" He held it against the

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

gnawed, ravaged stump. "The rats did that the first night he arrived."

"The Horse God might prevent you from catching the sickness," the *kozo* suggested.

"The Horse God is welcome indeed," Churchy-san assured them. "But my Okami-sama protects me from sickness."

With the red cord, the policeman attached the long swath of hair to the hobbyhorse and stood back to view the effect.

"It does well enough," he conceded. "If the rats will leave it alone. See what they did to our Old One." And off in a corner stood the mangy Horse God emeritus, gazing with glassy eyes at his dapper successor.

"We leave now," the policeman went on. "Over there is the house of the *Eta* who are surely all dead by this time." Following his white cotton glove, Churchy-san saw a thatched hovel at the edge of the forest that looked as forlorn as an old summer hat abandoned under the trees.

"Be sure you bring food twice a week," Churchy-san said to the boy.

"I'll not fail you," he promised, "until I find you have not used the last lot, and I'll know you are dead."

"No fear," Churchy-san laughed. "My Okami-sama . . ." but the pair had already turned and were hurrying along the path that led to the village.

Crossing a long, sunny meadow, Churchy-san saw, with a sinking heart, that the hut held no sign of life. No smoke

## *Paradox Isle*

drifted out of the hole in the thatch that served as a chimney, and the doorway gaped as hollow and dark as an empty eye socket. A Siberian kite, flying high overhead, alone broke the silence with his whimpering cry. A hot spring, running the length of the field, sent up a ribbon of steam that marked its course through the tall grass until it was gathered into a pool under a huge ginkgo tree. Churchy-san's spirits rose at the sight.

"She sees the honorable bath and the laundry," Nobu explained in a whisper.

At the door of the hut the stench threw her back a few paces, and peering around in the gloom, Churchy-san made out five human forms stretched on the dirt floor under a platform piled high with wilted leaves. Two of the figures held the unmistakable stillness of death, and the other three — an old woman and a pair that Churchy-san took for husband and wife — were groaning faintly, their bodies a mass of sores. As she bent over them with comforting words, they asked no help for themselves or how the other two fared.

"The silkworms," they moaned. "Feed the silkworms. If we lose them, better we die." And before they would accept help, Churchy-san must go out and gather an armful of mulberry leaves and spread them on the trestle overhead, where the silkworms fell on them greedily. Here Churchy-san broke off and looked at me doubtfully.

"This part is not pretty," she said. "Perhaps the *oku-san* is not interested."

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

“All things interest her,” Nobu declared. “Don’t even leave out the silkworms. She must hear that during July these *mushi* are fed on chopped mulberry leaves seven and eight times a day. All day the children must gather them, and the old people chop them up fine. In August the *mushi* may eat the full leaf, but it must be just so — not fresh, not dead — just wilted a little. It is then they go into the ‘great feed’ lasting ten days and nights. No one takes the rice, takes the sleep, not even makes loose the *obi*. My old ones bred the silkworm and during summer moons the quilts were not laid down at night, nor the rice bowls set out for the small ones.” Nobu’s voice had grown plaintive as she went on, and reaching into her sleeve she brought out a sweet cake from a cache that she keeps for such crises.

“Well then,” she concluded, with a cake tucked away in her cheek. “Chachy-san nurses those dirty Outcasts — they are the Christian duty. She buries the honorable dead — that cannot be helped. But she likes not the silkworms and with them she does not share.”

Inured as Churchy-san was to the sight of poverty, she had been appalled by the destitution of her patients. The most squalid hovel in town held some touch of amenity, a tiny carved shrine perhaps, or a flowering plant, but these people had nothing. The smoke-blackened interior was bare except for a rude oven made of field stones, a few broken bowls and the verminous mats that served them for beds. Severe as the test was to Churchy-san’s

## *Paradox Isle*

Christian endurance, she went to work quite undaunted. The first task, after her patients were seen to, was to burn the dead bodies and bury their ashes. Churchy-san made a huge funeral pyre in the meadow, and when the flames had died down, buried what bones she could find to a medley of prayers, marking the graves with blank pieces of wood, not knowing how the dead had been called.

The first shafts of sunlight found Churchy-san at the hot spring for water to bathe her three pensioners; then the dirt floor was sprinkled, rice cooked on the stone oven, and the silkworms fed on fresh mulberry leaves. What the Outcasts thought of this unlooked-for assistance, Churchy-san never knew, as in their wretched existence outside the pale, kindness and gratitude were unknown experiences, and they accepted her presence without comment or thanks. Churchy-san felt that five weeks spent in fetid darkness, caring for creatures that were far less responsive than animals, was no more than her Christian duty, but her goodwill stopped short of the silkworms. She heartily loathed the fat, white worms, endlessly gobbling their way through the leaves on their insecure platform. Each night when the day's work was done, she spread her mat under the stars for fear that a silkworm might fall on her face as she slept.

A day came at last when the family crawled out into the sunshine. After resting a while, the man rose to his feet and took the path that led to the village. He returned with a portion of rice mixed with red beans, a delicacy

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

which *Hoso-no-Kami*, the Smallpox God, is said to enjoy. The time had come to placate that virulent deity and speed him on his way.

Followed by Churchy-san, the *Eta* crossed the meadow, now high with grass and the stalks of wildflowers no longer in bloom, to the hot spring. They spread a mat on the moss and on it they placed the rice with willow wands planted here and there to hold the red prayer papers. After the head of the family had muttered a few unintelligible words, they set the mat and the offerings afloat on the stream, which sucked them down greedily in its spinning eddies and whirlpools.

As the last flash of scarlet vanished from sight, the Outcasts turned to Churchy-san with dull hostile eyes. "Now go," the old woman said. "*Hoso-no-Kami* has left. You're not wanted here." And as Churchy-san watched the trio retrace their steps till they disappeared in the doorway, a feeling of desolation swept over her.

"*Arrah ma!*" Nobu snorted. "She regrets these uncouth ones who do not even thank. . . ."

Churchy-san was quick in defense of her charges. One should not expect much of poor and ignorant people, she said. As well look for thanks from a wild animal whose foot you released from a trap. She had no feeling at all for her patients and, Christo-sama forgive her, she hated their silkworms. But she knew that on her return she must take up drab household tasks, and many a dull day stretched between her and the next Christian duty. The

## *Paradox Isle*

thought made the last weeks stand out, with each loathly detail bathed in the light of her wistful remembrance.

"*E to —*" Churchy-san walked slowly across to the shrine of the Horse God. There was little incentive to hurry toward a future bereft of all Christian duties. She returned to the pool with her bundle of clean clothing, where she stripped and burned everything she had worn, before she plunged into the hot water.

Settled there chin-deep, with knees drawn up and arms clasping them, Churchy-san saw for the first time that the season had changed. Autumnal quiet hung over the land, over the high, pine-clad hills and fertile valleys below, where scattered about like a design worked in blue beads the peasants were threshing their rice by drawing it back and forth through a large comb with steel teeth. It was so still she could hear the faint breeze, sharp with the first hint of frost, murmuring in the dark pines, whispering through the grass. It fluttered the gingko tree overhead until it rippled with thousands of fluted gold coins, flinging them down like a royal largesse, while two water wag-tails bowed their thanks from the bank.

When it was time to be off, strength and buoyancy had forsaken the number-one Christian. All at once, the road seemed dull and deserted. She made little progress although it lay downhill all the way and was frequently forced to rest before her weary body could take up the journey again. On one such occasion Churchy-san waked

## *Churchy-san — Number-One Christian*

from an uneasy doze to find a young man in a sailor's blue uniform standing beside her.

"Does this road go to Tokyo?" he asked as soon as she opened her eyes, and rising with difficulty, Churchy-san offered to show him the way. Limping along beside her, the sailor grew confidential, told her that he had been wounded fighting in Shanghai and returned to a naval hospital in Japan. On receiving his discharge, he had hurried back to his village, intending to spend his sick leave with his parents, only to find total strangers in his home who told him his parents were dead.

Like all Japanese when deprived of their accustomed place in the mass, he was bewildered and lost. What would he do then? He had no idea. His only friends were his shipmates, his family was scattered or dead, and he had almost no money. His helplessness acted on Churchy-san like a powerful restorative, bringing strength to her weary limbs and deep content to her soul. By the time they had completed their journey to Tokyo, she was well launched on another adventure.

"The honorable sailor has a hole in his leg as big as a fifty-*sen* piece," Nobu informed me with relish. "Would the *okusan* . . ."

"No, thank you."

"Well then, the *okusan* can see *him* if she condescends to look out of the window." By craning my neck, I caught a glimpse of a sunburned country youth in a sailor's blue

## *Paradox Isle*

uniform. He was resting on a bench in the sun with his game leg thrust out before him, making friendly overtures to the dogs who circled about him suspiciously.

"Are you going to marry this one?" I asked, and Churchy-san's startled eyes showed me that the idea was a new one.

"We have not spoken of it," she said. "Only that I am to care for him until he returns to the war."

"Making marry is better," said Nobu virtuously from her established position as matron, but carefully avoiding my eye.

"Well, be sure you want to undertake this kind of Christian duty," I urged. "You always have work here, and your wages can go to the poor."

"But I would not be earning the money." There were tears of distress in the girl's eyes. "Soon the old one, Suzuki-san, returns from her long rest, and with her, no help-*amah* is necessary. But this sailor *needs* me. Until he goes back to his ship I must with him." She rose to her feet with decision.

"As you say," I agreed. "Go, and a welcome return."

Instead of making the required reply to this particular speech, Churchy-san lingered uneasily at the door. "One thought makes the worry," she finally brought out with a return of her old shyness. "Perhaps this sailor is not the *real* Christian duty, because for him I have the big liking."

---

---

## CHAPTER VI

### *Nonsensical Minutiae*

---

---

*"I think I can see the precise and distinguishing marks of national characteristics more in these nonsensical minutiae than in the most important matters of state. . . ."*

STERNE: Sentimental Journey

---

#### 1

For a good many years before the practice was disrupted by the second World War, Great Britain, France, Germany and the United States sent language students to Japan as members of their embassy staffs. They were picked men, officers of the army, the navy and diplomatic corps who put in several arduous years of work on the Japanese language, on the history, literature and social problems of the people.

The course prescribed by each government was practically the same, and among the requirements was the spending of six months alone in the country, where the

## *Paradox Isle*

students were obliged to live more or less in native fashion, dependent for companionship upon the Japanese.

In theory the plan was excellent. The opportunities it offered for practicing the language and closely observing the lives and habits of the people were obvious; and some of the students weathered the apprenticeship successfully. A large percentage, however, returned to Tokyo with shattered nerves and so violent a phobia for anything Japanese that they were recalled by their governments without finishing the course.

No one knew just where the trouble lay. They lived comfortably enough and, in general, were treated by the natives with courteous detachment. But the complete isolation among a people so different from their own, whose lives and thoughts were as tightly closed against another race as their houses were against night marauders, worked havoc with the sensitive European's morale.

Six months was, perhaps, too short a time for them to penetrate the barrier raised by a reserved and suspicious people, but had they spent the rest of their lives among Japanese, the same gulf would have separated them. Foreigners who have elected to adopt the life and civilization of Japan, even to native dress and food, are never quite at home. There is always an anxious, self-conscious air about them; none of the ease that comes from a common sense of values, nor the quick, careless give and take that makes for real fellowship.

During the rainy season — the *nyubai* — depression

## *Nonsensical Minutiae*

settled on these temporary expatriots like the noxious mildew that clung to their books, their shoes and gloves, leaving on some of them a lasting stain. Walls of hot rain, day after day, shut out the sane reality of laws, familiar streets, and friendly intercourse and dissolved the compulsions under which they normally lived until nothing was left but the instincts. And the students reacted according to their national predilections.

The German students inclined toward melancholia and some of them opened their veins with bits of bottle glass; the French sought distraction among the ladies, causing a new section to be inserted in the Japanese police regulations concerning the "protection of innocent maidens from foreign spies"; and the British and Americans took it out in spectacular brawls, which resulted in blackened eyes, bloody noses and a stiff rating from their superior officers on the "scandal and disgrace" of such conduct in a foreign land.

So the embassies took counsel together and resolved that, whereas the East and the West had "met" and inevitably would continue to "meet," results had proved that they did not mix with any degree of success and that six months of intensive association with the Japanese would no longer be required in the course.

Some effort was made to find a harmless substitute for that phase of the students' life, but without success. As far as I know, a study of the Japanese drama was not suggested. Naturally the theatre in Tokyo could hardly be

## *Paradox Isle*

reckoned comparable to life in a native community, although the ideals, customs, and salient characteristics of the people are undoubtedly reflected there as in no other aspect of Japanese life.

### 2

Of the five or six large theatres in Tokyo, playing to capacity houses, the Kabuki-za ranks first in importance. It is a large, picturesque building that houses not only the theatre itself, but a medley of little shops, restaurants, and passages where, between plays, the audience buys souvenirs, eats capacious meals, promenades, and takes naps.

The auditorium is spacious with European seating arrangements, but the boxes encircling the width of the house are furnished in native style with matting, flat cushions, braziers and the usual equipment for tea. Whole families crowd into them, from grandmother to the youngest babe in arms, with baggage enough for a long journey. Lunch boxes, warm wraps, a medicine case, cigarettes and a supply of diapers are stowed away somehow, and everyone settles down happily to spend the day.

The audience looks prosperous and well dressed. The older people appear in rich silks of subdued colors, the young girls in gay kimono with more daring designs, but the *geisha* are easily distinguished by the gorgeousness of their raiment and the glittering ornaments they wear in their hair. The crowd probably looks much as it did in the first days of *shibai* when performances began at

## *Nonsensical Minutiae*

dawn. Before daylight, throbbing beats from the drum tower got people out of their beds and into their holiday clothes before they snatched a hurried meal by lantern light. The country people, who had been on their way to town most of the night, must have hastened their lagging footsteps at the sound, and the *geisha*, in layer after layer of vivid kimono, spoke sharply to the patient hairdressers who were washing, oiling and looping their elaborate coiffures while the maids tied their stiff, brocade *obi*.

There is always a thrill of expectancy in any theatre before the curtain rises, but the effect is heightened in the Kabuki-za by steady drumbeats which form an undercurrent for the subdued rustle of the silk-clad throng settling into its place and the sibilant apologies of late-comers to those already seated. Gradually one becomes aware of the flute that has joined the drum, weaving a weird and intricate measure through the marked rhythm, to which the light, fluttering beat of a *Noh* drum is added, growing faster and faster until wooden clappers announce that the play is about to begin.

One of the first features to attract a foreigner's notice is the *hana-michi* or flower way, a raised gangplank that runs from the stage to the rear of the theatre, and is used most effectively for entrances and exits. While the players are carrying on the main action upon the stage, a procession of priests in black gauze robes may march solemnly down the *hana-michi* through the gaping audience, chanting the sutras; or a crowd of fighting men swarm

## *Paradox Isle*

through that way to a fight taking place on the stage. Be they travelers, unlucky lovers, clanking *samurai* or quarrelsome old ladies that come and go on the *hana-michi*, one can see that it contributes substantially to the close collaboration between the actors and their audience, which is silent and deeply attentive, more concerned with the interpretation of a particular rôle than with the story itself.

A Kabuki audience knows all the old plays by heart, which is necessary, as not one out of twenty understands what is being said on the stage. The language used in the plays is antiquated and has been formalized beyond recognition except by the few who have made it a special study. Although the modern plays are written in the colloquial tongue and the dialogue is readily followed, the old, historical plays, telling of loyalty, treachery and revenge, have a strong perennial hold on the people because they express something deep and permanent in the Japanese character.

The general effect of the historical plays is one of great sumptuousness. The elegance and simplicity of the stage settings are a perfect foil for the actors' costumes of rich silks and gold-crusted brocades in traditional designs and colors. The actors move deliberately through their parts, accompanying their lines with exaggerated facial grimaces, rolling their eyes, twisting their mouths and stamping their feet to accent their speech. The result is one of childishness but not of inconsequence, as the most com-

## *Nonsensical Minutiae*

monplace action is carried out with smoothness and skill. The sweep with which a warrior flings off his kimono to bare his sword arm, or the manner in which a maidservant kneels to open a sliding door has been studied and perfected for an audience that is steeped in its own traditions and can appreciate the subtle excellence of the performance.

The stage management too is impressive, and the revolving stage that holds three sets at once, is operated successfully. You can watch the assassins creep through the shadowy garden toward a corrupt official's house; then the whole scene pivots silently and you are in the victim's bedroom with the murderers making a stealthy entrance at the closed lattices.

It is with the large groups and in the crowd scenes that the Japanese gift for collective effort is most effectively demonstrated, and the result is a satisfying, co-ordinated picture in which the humblest extra plays his part with unselfish verve. The outstanding example of this trait is the *kurombo*, or property man, who is clad in plain black with a flap over his face which he never lifts short of an emergency.

He flits unobtrusively about the stage attending to a hundred details while the audience is supposed to be unaware of his presence. He gives verisimilitude to a garden scene by sending two yellow butterflies across the stage; he marks the tiger's furtive progress through a patch of tall grass, and sends a vagrant firefly to inspire a young

## *Paradox Isle*

poet, dreaming late over his writing brush and ink slab.

In the long, elaborate dance-dramas the *kurombo* squats downstage with props at hand which instantly transform the beautiful princess into a raging mountain demon or a mischievous white fox. Under his ministrations, her sleek black hair and smooth make-up vanish in a flash and the dancer turns toward the audience a face ravaged with hate, under a disheveled mane of white hair.

On the stage, the distinguishing mark of a ghost or a fiend is a gray or white wig, as most Japanese, men and women alike, keep their hair black with camellia oil dye till the day of their deaths. I wondered if this traditional make-up for a devil might not account for the fear a gray-haired foreign woman seems to inspire among the more ignorant Japanese. Our legendary matron is an object of deference and solicitude, and I have observed with astonishment that, in a country where age is universally venerated, a woman with gray hair is regarded with fear and repulsion. Until I had seen a few ghost plays and demon dances I attributed this to the fact that their own grandmothers, more often than not, are perfect tartars. I asked some Japanese friends what they thought of my theory, and after a moment of discomfort, which a new idea always induces, and another for careful consideration, they laughed and admitted that it had never occurred to them but might easily be so.

## Nonsensical Minutiae

### 3

Roughly speaking, there are four classes of popular drama. The *jidai mono*, or historical plays, having to do with the feudal period and its princes, fierce *samurai*, and courtesans, in which the theme is loyalty, the sacrifice of the individual to chivalric duty. The *sewa mono* are realistic plays of ordinary life, in which elopements and double suicides play a prominent part. *Aragoto* might be translated "rough stuff" and are single battle scenes; and *shosagoto*, or music posture pieces, are adapted largely from famous *Noh* plays.

Every program is planned to include a play of each type. The curtain rises in mid-afternoon on three acts of a historical play, followed by a music-posture drama lasting only an hour or so. Next comes a battle scene and two more short plays which are usually the work of a new playwright. After a long intermission, during which everyone crowds into the restaurants for much-needed food and drink, the audience returns to a *sewa mono* depicting the joys and sorrows of everyday people, in which the joys are conspicuously scanty and the only likeable characters commit suicide. As the audience has been bathed in tears throughout the last offering, the concluding piece is a lively dance in which the young actors take part. Close on midnight you rise from your seat, if you are able, with both feet asleep, a stiff neck and splitting

## *Paradox Isle*

head, but with a firm conviction that a Japanese audience gets the full worth of its money.

For the most part, the plays are serious and lacking in humor, and what passes for humor takes the form of ponderous punning and far-fetched play on words. Even though we cannot expect to get the full fling of a sentence in Japanese as we do in English, and humor is the first gift to perish in a foreign tongue, there is none of the lighthearted gaiety, the nimbleness of wit and fancy, which characterize our idea of amusement. It has nothing in common with the slow reserve and the brooding melancholy of people who spend their lives in the subdued half-light of their low-eaved little houses.

Typical of the race, the action of the theatre is slow and is interrupted by interminable conversations during which all the characters sit in a circle as motionless and blank as a group of stalagmites, although their lives and happiness may hang on the outcome of the discussion. In the *hara-kiri* scene of the *Forty-Seven Ronin*, Lord Hangan sits upright gripping the knife with which he has disemboweled himself, holding forth for well over an hour in a strong, lusty voice. Meanwhile, Japanese crouch on their cushions enthralled, weeping without restraint, and the Europeans fidget in their seats, wondering how much longer the dying man can hold out.

The Japanese people are apparently impervious to *ennui* and everything they do lasts too long — their entertainments, their social calls, their letters and political

## *Nonsensical Minutiae*

speeches. It may be because, contrary to popular belief, their mentality works slowly except for a possible five-percent leaven of brilliant minds. They seem to need time to collect their faculties, and their spoken language makes provision for this with the ejaculation *ne* which crops up between almost every word in ordinary conversation, giving the listener a chance to take in what has just been said before the next word is upon him.

I know that foreigners are warned, when addressing a Japanese for the first time in his own tongue, to begin with *anno ne* — look here, and repeat it over and over until the light of recognition dawns for, on seeing a European, the Japanese at once assumes that he cannot understand him. This method of address gives the Japanese time to collect the wits which a stranger's approach has scattered. Any other method is apt to be met with startled silence.

As revenge is the standard theme of all the old plays, the love motive is naturally subordinate, and the heroine of a Japanese play has a very thin time indeed.<sup>1</sup> Her only possible rôle is that of self-sacrifice, and she is forever surrendering her lover, her husband or son to his patriotic or filial duties. She moves gracefully through the scenes, beautifully clad, speaking her lines in an odd falsetto that caricatures rather than imitates a Japanese woman's ordinarily timbreless tones, and her parts in the various plays are hardly distinguishable. Only the old

<sup>1</sup> In Kabuki plays women's roles are acted by men.

## *Paradox Isle*

women have individuality, showing, at times, a trace of sardonic humor, which is also true of Japanese life.

Vengeance for the wrong done a feudal lord is the theme of the classic *Chushingura* and revenge for a father's death is the theme of the Soga brother's vendetta and of *Sukeroku* — to mention only three of the many perennials which are produced every year and never fail to evoke deep emotion. The measure of Japanese heroism is retaliation, and the most popular means of accomplishing this is by treachery. Such treason is always ennobled by the motives of the traitor, who carries out his bloody mission with a sort of tragic helplessness before fate.

Benkei, the hero of the dance-drama *Kanjincho*, runs the leader of the forty-seven *ronin* a close second in popular favor. He too was a victim of *Bushido*, but his sacrifice was accomplished in a less grisly fashion. He struck his master, actually assaulted his prince, to save the latter's life. The plot is a simple one, but casts some light on the Japanese mind which needs solid traditional sentiment as a guide.

Yoshitsune, the reigning Shogun's younger brother, has been outlawed and is fleeing for his life. His retainers, led by Benkei, have dressed themselves like warrior monks, with the prince, disguised as a servant, carrying their luggage.

They file through the audience by the *hana-michi* to find the Shogun's officer on guard at the barrier which

## *Nonsensical Minutiae*

they hope to pass and, rather than risk a skirmish, Benkei resorts to guile. They have been on a mission, he explains, to collect funds for the Great Buddha's temple at Nara and are on their way home. The official is wary and demands further proof of their identity. He insists that, if they have actually visited the temple at Nara, they must have a subscription list (*kanjincho*) and before they can pass he must hear it.

Benkei draws a blank scroll from his robe and improvises a long list of donors. This only partially convinces the sceptical officer and he snatches suddenly at the roll. A battle seems imminent. Both men whip off the sleeves of their sword arms and, crouching with their hands on their hilts, wait for the other to draw. As they maneuver for position, stooping and side-stepping across the stage, they are so like two fighting cocks waiting for a chance to close in with their spurs that an image I have been groping for in my mind comes out into the light.

Chanticleer! We had always agreed that the Japanese suffered from some sense of inferiority. The theory is supported by the Japanese claim that the sun rises in their land and by their having the sun-flag as their national emblem and the sun goddess as their principal deity. And do they not flap both arms in the air, fling back their heads and crow *banzai* to express exultation?

When the Hen Pheasant taunted Chanticleer with: "But can you not see that the day has risen without the benefit of your crowing?" The cock denies the daylight

## *Paradox Isle*

before his eyes. So does the Japanese insist that their lavish borrowings were "invented in Japan," and as long as he remains in his own country the myth can be maintained. Abroad he must face the fact that the sun also rises in other lands, that artificial light actually originated there. So serious is this sudden impairment of his power to believe in himself that he can meet and deal with the situation only by violence.

Chanticleer's dictum when faced with defeat might have been penned for the Japanese: "He who has witnessed the death of his dream must die at once or else rise stronger than ever." And we know that the Japanese admit no middle course between triumph and death — they must never admit defeat or surrender.

A burst of applause from the gallery brought me back to the play to find the Shogun's officer waving the monks through the barrier. Then moved by a sudden suspicion, he calls them back. In desperation, Benkei pretends to fall foul of his master, berates him for a clumsy servant, and strikes him. The official, though still unconvinced of their innocence, is so awed by this devoted piece of self-sacrifice that he allows the whole party to proceed unmolested. And once they are safely beyond the pass, Benkei kneels at the young prince's feet to beg forgiveness. He has saved his lord's life but his own is forfeited. When Yoshitsune clasps the hand of his faithful guardian and forgives and thanks him, there is not a dry kimono sleeve in the whole auditorium.

## *Nonsensical Minutiae*

As can be seen from this tale, the subtlety that the Japanese expect of its presentation does not extend to the theme. To a foreign observer, the combination of superlative acting and puerility of plot is a distinct shock. It is a logical representation, however, of a people who are at once sophisticated and immature, a strange mixture of naïveté, craftiness, and idealism. Their craftiness is often naïve; their naïveté is tainted with cunning; and their idealism is both, with something better too. It is this last that has disarmed us in past years.

Although their islands have long been overcrowded and although they have been kept closely at work because so many of their things are made by hand, they have developed a dignified, stately society with an ancient tradition of manners behind it which has made every relationship, until recent years, orderly and reserved. All of this is reflected in their theatre. There it is revealed that the governing motive at all times has been one of social decorum, and that treachery, murder, and suicide have never been regarded as religious problems.

When the hero of *Omi Genji* — a popular loyalty play — is engaged in deceiving a representative of the Shogun, his nephew and heir commits suicide to create a diversion and so saves the day. The uncle, however, takes no more heed of the act than to reproach the dying boy for showing off before so august a visitor. And in *Iku-dama Shinju*, a tale of hopeless love between a courtesan and the son of a porcelain merchant which ends in dou-

## *Paradox Isle*

ble suicide, the young man dispatches his love with gruesome thoroughness. As he turns the knife toward himself, he recalls that it was a gift from his parents and that to use it for suicide would be a heinous offense against filial piety. He then wipes the blade carefully on the dead girl's kimono and proceeds to hang himself with her girdle. The proprieties are maintained.

Looking back, one easily sees why the drama has always been a popular art in Japan, maintaining its hold through the years notwithstanding the government's sporadic attempts to suppress it.

The players' appeal to their audience is an intimate, personal one, giving the drama a power over the people immensely greater than that of literature because its approach is to the emotions rather than to the intellect. And the emotional development of the Japanese is far in advance of his intellectual growth.

Any Japanese crowd gives the impression that between individuals there is a much narrower space than that which divides Europeans. At the theatre this is intensified until a mere stranger feels the stir of a common emotional excitement that fuses the disparate atoms into one quickened entity, and he realizes that, once aroused, the Japanese are very formidable in the mass.

The mute, self-effacing *kurombo* in his black robes is a product of a country where the cult of the individual is sternly suppressed, where a citizen sees himself only as part of the national essence — *kokutai* — and, lacking

### *Nonsensical Minutiae*

a sense of personal identity, is not apt to regard life or death very seriously. I suppose if the *kurombo* had time to brood over his life of anonymous service on the stage, it would be glorified in his eyes by the fact that the vital element in this communion is the Emperor himself, whom he worships, not as the individual head of the state but as the corporate expression of the nation's ideal.

---

---

## CHAPTER VII

### *The General Saves His Medal*

---

---

<i>Tomo ga mina</i>	Until today it seemed my friends
<i>Ware yori eraku</i>	Had won distinction more than I in life.
<i>Miyuru ki yo</i>	However, I have purchased flowers,
<i>Hana wo kai-kite</i>	
<i>Tsuma to shitashimu.</i>	And also love my wife.

ISHIKAWA TAKABOKU

---

1

There is rarely more than one heavy snowfall in Tokyo each winter; so it is usually a festive affair. It is snowing now, for the first time this season, but somehow the carnival spirit is lacking.

For the Japanese, this is probably due to their endless struggle to subdue China and to the steadily mounting fear of another and bigger war on their hands. But for me it revives all too vividly the Big Cold of last year and what happened next door, which the hurrying whisper of sifting snow must call into being for a long time to come.

## *The General Saves His Medal*

The snow started then as it usually does, out of a dour, slate-colored sky, falling to work like a Japanese woman, softly and aimlessly, hour after hour. It clung to the trees and shrubs in the gardens, bending the branches under its weight. And soon, the old people, picking their way through the drifts on high lacquered clogs, could hang their poems on any twig they might choose. It transformed the graceful, curved roofs of old shrines and palaces into the frothy swing of a dancer's skirt, and laid a neat coverlet on the small shops and houses where people sat late over glowing braziers talking in low tones. Over head, the children lay wakeful in their quilts, alert to the exciting quiet of the muffled world outside.

Imperceptibly the night grew lighter and the sight of the snow flung up like a wave against the garden gate reminded me that I must go out and shake the dwarf bamboo before they snapped under its weight. In spite of the early hour, long arrows of light escaped from the closed wooden shutters on General Yamada's house next door, and I wondered if his wife, a gentle pitiful cripple, had been taken ill in the night. The General himself was away a great deal of the time and his wife was alone except for an old servant, who was often glad of our help when her mistress had an attack.

The bamboo, freed from their burden of snow, swung languidly into place against the fence, and I had decided that I really should inquire if all was well next door, when I heard the General's gate slide back cautiously,

## *Paradox Isle*

slam to with a crash, and the voice of his old servant raised in shrill, whispered protest.

"*Ma yo*, Old One!" she quaked. "What a fright you gave me. Can you hear my heart going *doki-doki* from where you stand?"

Peering through the slats in the fence I could see the watchman standing outside in a circle of rosy lantern light.

"Excuse me, Ichi-san," he quavered. "But this is the hour when robbers creep out of a house just as you did. I trust the General's lady is no worse."

"No worse, no better, thanks for your interest," the old woman snapped, which left me free to return to the bed I had left so reluctantly, but in spite of rapidly congealing feet I waited, eavesdropping shamelessly.

"I am setting the sun-flag out over the gate," the servant went on, producing a slim bamboo pole, "and as long as you're here you might help me with it."

The watchman put his lantern down obediently. "Is it a new police rule that our flags must be out before daylight?" he wanted to know.

"That's one thing they haven't thought of yet," the old woman cackled. "And I hope they don't, for I hate coming out of the house before the sun has driven away any night spirits that might be about. No, I am getting an early start with my work today for at nine our master, the General, goes to the palace for a medal from the hand of *Heika* —

## *The General Saves His Medal*

the Emperor himself. For bravery it is, for taking a part of their country away from the Chinese."

"*Ah, so desuka?*"

"So, indeed. Don't you ever read the papers? We are having a fine feast tonight to celebrate. Five generals will attend, mind you, who have even more medals than our master, and there is much to be done in the house today. Now, Old One," she broke off briskly, "condescend to hold the pole up while I make it fast to the gate." Together they swung the flag over the fence where it hung motionless, its scarlet center standing out like a bloodstain against the surrounding whiteness.

"There," the watchman grunted, rubbing his cold fingers together, "that should hold even when the wind rises later." Picking up his lantern he swung it uncertainly, reluctant to return to his tour of the echoing streets. "It is a great honor for General Yamada," he ventured finally. "His lady, I'm sure, is very happy."

"She is so. You should see her lying there with a smile like the Kwannon-sama's own — half joy for the master's success, half tears for her sister's sorrow. Her nephew was killed in the battle the General won, you know."

The watchman sighed. "The young men die, and the old men return for their medals. *E to* — it cannot be helped," voicing the universal formula of the poor when faced with the irrevocable.

"This war!" Ichi cried fiercely. "Why should we send

## *Paradox Isle*

our sons to fight for a country that none of us wants to live in?" Breaking off abruptly she peered up and down the empty street. "We must be crazy to speak of such things where we might be overheard, unless we want to be behind bars before night. Come inside."

Closing the gate she locked and barred it. "What we both need is a cup of tea and a bowl of rice, for at our age no sorrow holds long against the comfort of food in the honorable insides."

"What an exit speech," I thought, as they crunched their way around to the kitchen door and I went back to bed to dream that I had lost both my feet from frostbite.

## 2

It was still snowing when the car hired to take the General to the palace drew up before his house. In spite of the weather a small crowd had gathered, errand boys mostly, from the neighboring shops, a *tofu* vendor who paused to gape with his copper horn halfway to his lips, and some women with swaddled babies on their backs.

As the General appeared at the gate a few scattered cheers went up from the boys, but he looked neither to right nor left, holding his heavy body erect in his new uniform of dark cloth, and the white plume in his cap as proud and unsullied as Cyrano's *panache*. At the door of the car he stopped, however, turned sharply and executed a sort of informal salute toward the upper window. I

## *The General Saves His Medal*

knew that the idlers could see a smiling face against the semi-darkness of the room behind and the flash of a pallid hand raised in reply.

As the taxi spluttered off in a shower of glittering beads, Suzuki brought in the flowers she had ordered for me to send the General's wife. I knew she thought I should take them over myself; so I set to work at once on the simplest message I could think of. *Omedeto* — congratulations — was about all my uncertain *kata kana* was equal to, and we tied the box up with those charming red and white cords they use on such occasions.

Within ten minutes she was back with a note that, unfolded, measured about a yard and a half and was written in beautiful script on mulberry paper. It translated to the effect that this happy day would be spoiled unless I went over to be thanked for the flowers in person. She knew well, the invalid wrote, that she should come over to me, but that was impossible. Would I overlook her indefensible rudeness, humor a sick woman's request and condescend to enter her unworthy house? This was embedded in a perfect welter of honorifics and polite assurances.

In spite of her urgency I hesitated to go at a time when the atmosphere was tense with the strain between our two countries. Her good manners could always be trusted, but the General was an unknown factor. Then too, I felt sure that Mrs. Yamada, like so many old-fashioned Japanese, really did not like foreigners, although a sort of

## *Paradox Isle*

tenuous friendship had developed between us during her husband's absence.

As she had worded it, I could hardly refuse her request, however, and the late afternoon found me sloughing my overshoes on the Yamadas' door stone. Any misgivings I had harbored about the warmth of my welcome departed at sight of Ichi's broad smile as she opened the door.

"Welcome," she cried, bowing her head to the floor. "Condescend to enter."

Twittering with excitement, she led me through the cold, deserted-looking rooms downstairs to one above which seemed by contrast incredibly light and spacious. The second floor of a Japanese house is always more attractive than the first, and the Yamada house was no exception.

The General's wife, propped upright on the floor by the window, gave a soft cry that held as much apprehension as pleasure I thought and laid down her book to smooth the sleeves of her gray silk kimono into more decorous lines.

"Welcome," she repeated, with a series of small, swooping bows, "you pay this house a great honor."

In the harsh glare of the snow outside she looked like a weary, beaten moth, with her gray wings folded submissively, but a sort of tranquil happiness, the happiness of a gentle, incurious mind, shone in her eyes and smile.

"How cozy we are," I told her, folding up with what

## *The General Saves His Medal*

grace I could on the cushion that Ichi placed for me. "How do you keep this large room so warm?"

"In the old-fashioned way," the General's wife smiled, and Ichi lifted the quilts that covered the invalid to her waist to show me a brazier sunk in the floor, filled with glowing charcoal in a deep bed of ashes, and protected by a cradle of wire netting.

"Come, put your feet against the fire-box here," the old woman coaxed. "It will warm you much better than those foreign-style pipes full of tepid water." I was glad to thrust my stockinged feet into the grateful warmth, and Ichi tucked the quilts in carefully before she departed to bring up the inevitable tea and sweet cakes, which she placed on a low table beside us.

"What a beautiful room," I said, casting about for some safe topic. "I have never seen it before."

"And I not for years," said the General's wife, then bit her lip for fear she had sounded plaintive and busied herself with a half-knit sock she unrolled from a square of colored silk.

Looking about, I thought how incongruous the warrior scroll was, framed by the graceful curves of the god-shelf, and the lacquer sword rack standing below it, holding two *samurai* blades. A field radio-set topped a beautiful wedding chest and a battered army locker trunk stood out like a stain against the tawny woodwork that blended smoothly into the deep cream matting on the floor.

## *Paradox Isle*

"It's a woman's room really," Mrs. Yamada said softly, voicing not only my thoughts but the mute protest of the room itself against these obvious signs of masculine ownership. Well, it was easy to see whose room it was now, and what the General might want with it, except that it was the best in the house, I could not imagine. He was away most of the time, and the room must stand empty while his wife spent her days in a little four-mat room next the kitchen.

"I must be downstairs, of course, as I am completely helpless and Ichi is so old," she went on, replying again to my unvoiced thought in the unnerving way they have. It is an unexpected trait in a people who seem so obtuse, whose mental process is slow, until you reflect that a race whose spoken words and gestures are designed to mask rather than reveal the thoughts behind them must, automatically, develop this defensive sixth sense.

There was a slither and thump overhead as a solid drift broke its hold on the tiled roof and plunged past the window in a feathery garment of flying snow.

"*Yuki Onna* — the Snow Woman!" the two Japanese cried in one voice. Then the General's wife laughed shakily, but the old servant drew a small Buddhist rosary from her sleeve with trembling fingers. "It means death," she whispered, "death to this house."

"Nonsense." Her mistress cut her off swiftly. "What will our visitor think of two superstitious old women? Death has already come to this house and taken my

## *The General Saves His Medal*

nephew Rentaro, who gave his life for his country. But he is not far from us. His spirit has gone into that pine tree and stands guard so that no harm can come to his family."

I must have looked puzzled, as she pointed to a magnificent pine standing just outside the window. "The pine is a *samurai* tree, as you know," she explained, "a *samurai* in shining black armor. This tree is like Rentaro too, tall and dark and strong."

"It is a consoling thought," I said, picking my words carefully because of my crude Japanese. "I fear that only time and the future could reconcile me to such a loss."

The General's wife nodded. "You belong to a race that is always hurrying forward," she said gently. "Most of your life is before you, so your thoughts run on ahead. Our real life lies in the past with our dead, who still control their families, and mine was over so long ago that there is nothing real but the past. My thoughts are like that vine over there, climbing down its own stem because there is nothing left to lay hold of."

Her voice, neither cheerful nor sad, made the casual statement of fact as she deftly turned the heel of the sock she was knitting. She seemed to withdraw to some inner fastness of her own, and I saw that twilight had crept in upon us, filling the room with slate-blue shadows. Across the way our old watchman moved from one lamp post to another, balancing precariously on his ladder, and in his

## *Paradox Isle*

wake a row of small yellow blooms sprang out against a backdrop of dark cedars.

### 3

"I must go," I murmured as the screech and grinding of brakes filled the silence between us, announcing the General's return. "I have stayed an unpardonable time." Hoping to avoid an encounter with him, I rose to my feet with the slight feeling of panic that the unpredictable quality of the Japanese arouses in me.

But Mrs. Yamada seemed genuinely distressed. "Condescend to remain a little longer," she begged. "You have been here such a short time." And from her point of view, my departure at the end of an hour or so would indicate that the visit had not been a success. The Japanese think nothing of a five or six hour call, departing refreshed while their foreign host is helped into bed with an ice bag on his head and a hot brick at his feet. Seeing me hesitate while the General bade a jovial farewell to his escort, his wife renewed her plea.

The General, she said, would be so glad to find me there, which I thought extremely doubtful. He would want to show us his medal. She was so insistent in her gentle way that I subsided again on the cushion while she selected a sheet from a little book of powder papers, rubbed it over her nose and cheeks, patted her hair into place and settled back on her pillows.

"He will come straight upstairs," she said confidently,

## *The General Saves His Medal*

although she knew we might wait that way for hours on end if her husband's attention were claimed elsewhere. Even for a visitor, it would never occur to her to summon him, especially if that visitor was a woman, for gracious waiting was our proper rôle in life.

The scurry and stir of the master's return had subsided below, and the whole house seemed to share the quiet of the shrouded world outside. The street was empty except for a line of Nichiren priests marching in time to the strange measure beaten out on their fan-shaped drums. Their soiled white robes made the snow seem deadly white by contrast, and from their seamed, greedy faces short black veils flapped grotesquely in the rising wind.

As they disappeared around the corner the rapid thud of unshod feet sounded at last on the stairs, and a flush of pleasure spread over Mrs. Yamada's face, restoring for an instant to its faded sweetness the warmth and animation of girlhood.

"Welcome return!" we chorused politely.

"Ha. The honored neighbor." The General managed a sketchy bow in my direction, though his thoughts and eyes were on the small tray he held in his hand. "See what I have brought you," he rumbled. "A taste of the wine for tonight's feast — without spilling a drop — and her favorite flower for my wife." He handed her a single branch of flowering plum.

"How beautiful!" She touched the few perfect blooms

## *Paradox Isle*

that clung to its twisted stem with light, caressing fingers. "But you should not concern yourself with me when matters of such importance claim your time. I do not deserve it."

The General waved aside her thanks in high good humor. "I remained below to feed the flowers our visitor sent," he explained. "I wrapped them in damp newspapers and left them in the dark to rest. Until they wake I have nothing to do."

He seated himself with an air of dogged assurance and drew the ends of his worn silk kimono about his knees. Observing his square, obstinate face under a stubble of stiff graying hair, his small opaque eyes that gave away nothing, I hoped that an air of polite detachment concealed my hearty dislike for his type of Japanese.

"You are so skillful with flowers," his wife murmured. "You should be decorated for that also." She dropped her eyes quickly, fearing her timid gambit had been too direct for courtesy.

"*Baka des na* — what a fool I am." The General slapped his knee apologetically. "I forgot to bring up my medal." He made no move to go after it, I noticed, and the servant would never be allowed to touch anything that had been in the hands of the Emperor.

"What wonder?" No shadow of his wife's disappointment dimmed her smile, as she turned to me and explained: "You see, we celebrate tonight with a feast, and

## *The General Saves His Medal*

I lie here useless while he undertakes my duties as well as his own."

"Condescend to be at ease. Things could be no better, I feel sure, had you been about since daybreak." Then seeing the pucker of care between her brows, he added hastily: "Come now, drink your *saké* while it is hot — our visitor has finished hers — for I want your opinion on a matter of small importance. The guests for tonight have composed a verse or two in honor of my poor efforts in China, which means I must reply in kind. It is a Japanese custom," he said to me. "I am no poet, as my wife knows, being handy with the sabre perhaps, but useless with a writing brush. As for a poem — you will die with laughter — but here it is:

"Sun-flag everywhere we soon shall see,  
But dead comrades' faces in dreams I see.  
Futile these protests of other nations,  
Japan goes forth on Imperial Way."

Though he gabbled the words in a bumbling monotone that robbed them of all expression, his wife's mask of protective blankness, with which a Japanese faces a difficult situation, and the little I had understood, made his intention clear. Turning away to hide my rising anger I picked up Mrs. Yamada's book. If the General felt free to read a poem like that to a guest then I might retaliate by slighting his poetical efforts as of no consequence.

"What are you reading?" I asked. "I hope it is as nice as it looks in that lovely brocade binding."

## Paradox Isle

"Lady Murasaki's Diary." She gratefully accepted my diversion, but the General forged once more to the front. "Murasaki's Diary!" His heavy brows conveyed a rebuke. "I should think that *Wheat and Soldiers* or something more timely — "

"But it *is* timely." A wave of color mounted to the line of black hair on Mrs. Yamada's brow, but she recaptured her book with an air of demure cajolery. "I used it to follow you to court this morning. As you have discovered my childish indiscretion, condescend to listen a moment. Ah, here it is:

"Two of the ladies in attendance on the Emperor came out from behind the *misu*. The lovely shape of their hair, tied with bands, was like that of the beauties in Chinese paintings. Lady Saemon held the Emperor's sword . . . her figure and movement when we caught a glimpse of it was flowerlike and dignified. Lady Ben-no-Naishi held the box with the Emperor's seals. Her *uchigi* was grape-colored, she is a very small, smile-giving person and seemed a little shy. . . ."

Raising her head, Mrs. Yamada looked at her husband wistfully. "Was it anything like that?" she wanted to know. "I saw you there in the beautiful Phoenix Hall this morning, while ladies in rich colored robes moved about among the crowd. Although I know well enough that such days and ways are long past, I like to think it was somewhat the same."

## *The General Saves His Medal*

"Then ask me no questions about it." The General's first perplexity had given way to amusement. "Your visit to court was far more splendid than mine. There were no smile-giving ladies in rainbow robes, only a few ugly old men like myself, standing about uneasily in their new uniforms — until His Imperial Majesty arrived," he amended reverently, and sat with bowed head for a second, as though his words had evoked the aura of that sacred presence. "What gave you the notion of following me to court?" he asked finally.

"I follow you everywhere. In that fashion I share all your great moments." I thought the General looked a little startled, but his wife went on gaily, drawing me into the talk. "I was with him at Nanking; on his long night marches through the open country; and at Hankow too. After his own victory I stood beside him on the battle-scarred gate of the city, and heard his burning words to his men drowned by the thunder of their *banzai*."

The General looked a little grim. "I never said a word to them," he muttered. "I had the hiccups. You know how it is when I am excited. Why this very morning I stood in a cold sweat for fear His Majesty's sacred words of commendation would be echoed by sounds from me so uncouth that they could only be atoned for by my death."

"Oh, pitiful!" His wife covered her ears with her fingers. "But tell me no more. Leave me my pictures, so I may share your life somehow, though as a shadow only."

## *Paradox Isle*

"What foolish talk," the General said to me. "She calls herself a shadow when she is my wife," and he used the humble word in speaking of her which means "the core of the house." A look like an invisible link of affection and security passed between them, and I wondered if this day had not marked the climax of their years together; and if to each one, on widely different terms, life seemed complete at the moment, a strong mutilating thing, grown out of what had once been simple happiness.

"By all means keep your pictures," the General sighed. And for the first time I noticed a look of weariness — not physical fatigue, but something more indefinable — that stretched the sunburned skin like parchment across his face. Perhaps all the honors and acclaim served only to remind him of the heavy price he had paid for them. The death of his nephew in that battle had deprived him of an adopted son, an heir to carry on his name and burn incense by his ashes when his day was done. "Keep your pictures," he repeated, "but our neighbor and I are of the world and we must face stern facts."

"It is true," I nodded, and on this note of accord I was free to go, leaving no feeling of strife behind for his wife to worry over later. "The fact I face is the storm, for I must return to my home."

The General accompanied me to the door, a concession to our customs by way of amends, I supposed, and as I struggled with my overshoes I heard him say to the servant: "Wake the flowers now. I will arrange them."

## *The General Saves His Medal*

And lay out my good kimono in the little room downstairs."

"But your medal," the old woman protested. "You can't wear your medal in kimono."

"No matter. It hangs in the *tokonoma* where everyone can see it better, including myself."

"The wind has risen," Ichi warned as she opened my umbrella. "It blows from the south, so the snow will be gone by morning. Deign to take rest, though it's little sleep to be had with six soldiers celebrating next door."

### 4

By bedtime the wind had risen to a stern roar, dwindling at times to a soothing drone that was cut through by shouts of *banzai* and snatches of drunken laughter from General Yamada's party.

What a woeful affair the General and his ilk had made of life in Japan, I thought. Since the war in China began they had filled the nights with a din like this, and the charming sounds of native life that used to emerge, one by one, as the massed roar of the city subsided, were lost forever it seemed. One listened in vain for the plaintive flute of the blind masseur, tapping his way through the streets; it could never survive the monotonous blare of the latest Japanese war song. No longer does the *soba* vendor's horn suggest a comforting bowl of hot noodles to those abroad late; now the *soba* man has nothing to sell; people go to bed hungry. The musical summons of

## *Paradox Isle*

a devout Buddhist, urging his ancestors' spirits to gather around, is drowned by the steady tramp of soldiers on their way to a night maneuver.

It must have been hours later when the bell on our neighborhood fire tower sent a harsh volley of sound clamoring through the hollow darkness. One. Two. Then three long peals, insistent enough to wake even a Japanese from his slumbers. One. Two. It must be near by, so I sat up in bed tugging at my stupefied wits, and all the dogs in the vicinity lent their voices to the alarm. Muffled figures began to appear in the street, lights flashed on in the houses, while the deadly strokes beat out their message, confirming an ever present fear, calling us to action.

White-faced women stood motionless in the doorways, waiting for their husbands to give them orders, to tell them what to do. "Is it anywhere near?" they called to the men. "Do you think it is coming this way?"

"*Oya, oya*, it's the General's house!" someone shouted from the corner.

A red engine fled past me in the street, its siren screaming out a high wild cry of warning, and pulled up before the burning house. Its crew hopped off agilely, leaving one man standing on the seat to hold the company's banner aloft as best he could against the wind, so that the sight of it would give them courage in their battle with the flames. Others ran up and down hunting for a hydrant under the blanketing snow, and a length of hose un-

## *The General Saves His Medal*

coiled behind them like an inert reptile that suddenly leaped to vehement life and sent icy jets of water over unwary onlookers who were standing transfixed by that strange joy that people feel at the sight of fire.

By the time I arrived, the police, with a great air of authority, had cleared a space before the house. Firemen had pulled down the high bamboo fence, tearing the gate from its hinges. "How did it start?" I gasped, as though someone must know. And a man answered gravely: "After such a feast there is often a fire. Much *saké* is drunk and they sleep heavily, while a lighted cigarette butt that has slipped between the mats . . ."

He broke off as General Yamada stumbled out of the house in a cloud of black smoke with one arm flung up before his eyes. Eager hands drew him to safety, and as his arm fell to his side I saw the look of stark panic that twisted his face into a living mask of fear. It vanished as he joined the front rank of witnesses and the fire's glare caught the medal he held in his other hand, clutched to his breast where it twinkled like an evil star. He must have rushed back into the house to get it after taking his wife to a place of safety, I thought, shuddering at what those moments on the steep, narrow staircase must have been, bent under the burden of his wife's helpless form, blinded by smoke, and knowing that one false step meant a horrible death for them both. Now the papers would have another story of his heroism for the morning. How they would play up his wife's rescue and his return to

## *Paradox Isle*

the blazing ruin for a decoration received from the Emperor.

A flock of pigeons, disturbed by the light and noise, flapped crazily about overhead, and people from near by houses appeared with drowsy children on their backs, while their servants dragged bedding and clothes into the open. A thin stream of water rose over our heads, taking ineffectual slaps at the torrent of smoke and flame that poured steadily upward. At that moment the house gave up another figure that scuttled out like a frenzied animal whimpering with fright and had gained the sidewalk before we recognized the indomitable Ichi.

Then from the crowd, edging back from the blistering heat, there rose a sigh like a single breath. The curtain of smoke before the second story had parted for an instant and between its thick flowing folds a face appeared with its mouth shaped for crying, and a thin hand reached out appealingly.

There was a moment of blind silence that ended in a piercing shriek as Ichi darted back toward the burning pile. As she ran her voice lost its note of panic, rising high and clear above the uproar in familiar words of reassurance. "No fear, *okusan*. Have no fear. I am coming for you."

She dodged the police who vainly tried to intercept her and disappeared into the glare of the gaping doorway. The roof crashed in with muffled boom of collapsing tiles, and a pulsing river of flame roared up into the

## *The General Saves His Medal*

stately guardian pine that, having betrayed its trust, seemed to writhe back in horror from what lay below.

Nothing now remained but the side walls, standing ragged and forlorn in the diminishing firelight. The heavy, throbbing roar of an engine told of a firetruck moving off; the lines of hose in the street were disappearing; and company chiefs were calling out orders to men who were stowing their axes away. The first pallid light of a winter's dawn spread over the sky and drops of icy rain fell on the chilled and stricken crowd. I noticed that the dying firelight, reflected in the puddles at our feet, smeared our faces with hollows and lines that made us look like a row of skulls.

Small groups began to edge away, giving quick furtive glances at the General who stood among us motionless, except for the convulsive jerks that struck his body heavy blows. One hand still clasped the medal to his breast and the other was riveted to his face. Through the rigid fingers I could see tears falling slowly on the star-shaped emblem of his valor.

"Yamada-san!" In sketchy, ill-matched garments some army officers pushed the people aside and hurried toward him. "My poor friend, what can we say? You have lost everything. Everything," they echoed.

At this the General came to life as though he had been given an expected cue. Dropping his hand, he turned his face toward them, streaming with his grief.

"It is so," he gulped. "Everything — but my life."

## *Paradox Isle*

And as a tired young man moved closer, notebook and pen in hand, the General raised his voice again. "Everything is lost but my life," he cried hoarsely, "which belongs to the Emperor — not to me."

His knees buckled, and he would have fallen had it not been for the strong, supporting hands about him. From the shadows I watched them lead him off, hiccuping, through the rain.

---

---

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Judgment of Solomon*

---

---

*"Like many things in Japan, when rendered into English, it seems too crazy to be credible. It is crazy, it is incredible, and it happened."*

HUGH BYAS

---

#### 1

I wonder if anyone has written about Japan, however briefly, and managed to omit all mention of the police. I fully intended to, except for the most casual reference perhaps, but I am finding it impossible to ignore an element that is so much a part of every Japanese scene.

On the broad modern thoroughfares the police are everywhere directing the traffic, while shifty-eyed plain-clothes men mingle with the crowds and hang about cafés, hot on the trail of "dangerous thoughts." Each narrow twisting lane has its police box from which the local gendarme supports his duties — be they ever so humble — with all the consequence of a fledgling diplomat. From the chief himself, in his dark uniform loaded with gold

## *Paradox Isle*

braid, to the last ill-paid recruit, they consciously reflect in their cheap brass insignia some gleam of the imperial dignity that forms the apex of their social order.

Since war began the magazines have carried tales of their cruelty to those unfortunate enemy aliens who fell into their hands, and dark hints were circulated of a high-ranking *Gestapo* official who had come to teach them some of the refinements of their trade. In reality, they had little to learn even from the *Gestapo*, having practically perfected a system of inhuman treatment for their own people that has been a scandal and a hissing among the Europeans living in their country for many years.

Tourists too, who flocked to Japan each spring at cherry blossom time, have spread the fame of the Japanese police, salting their home letters with descriptions of the quaint little men who swarmed aboard ship at quarantine and asked such idiotic questions with an air of portentous sternness. They could not resist a "snappy comeback" to these queries, happily ignorant of the fact that their sparkling repartee had been completely lost on the inquisitors, as the average Japanese official's knowledge of any tongue except his own was limited to a phrase or two at most, culled probably from an English conversation book that had been compiled for them in Germany.

Newcomers to Japan were acutely aware, at first, of the constant scrutiny to which their every act was subject; the bolder spirits found in it that same inexplicable

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

satisfaction that a headwaiter's recognition brings, an unction that was denied more timid souls, who endured a long period of apprehension before they learned to accept police supervision together with frequent earthquakes, summer rains, and autumn typhoons as part of the complicated pattern of their lives in Japan.

Once they had mustered the courage to venture out alone, they were only vaguely conscious of the figure in white knickerbockers and dark coat that stood at crowded intersections working a *stop* and *go* signal by hand. When a group of those same figures appeared together on the streets, it meant that a member of the imperial family was abroad, and anyone at all pressed for time made haste to leave the neighborhood to avoid being locked up in a stuffy shop with the shades drawn until the royal cortège had not only passed but had reached its destination.

For hours before the Emperor left his palace all traffic in that portion of the city was suspended and the police had cleared the offices overlooking the streets through which his car would pass. All motor traffic was routed on a wide detour, street cars were halted and their passengers forced to dismount, as no one might remain on the same level with the descendant of the sun, much less look down upon him.

When they were safeguarding the Emperor, there was something positively savage in the aspect of the police. Spaced at brief intervals, they stood facing the onlookers

## *Paradox Isle*

with the same wary vigilance with which a trainer of wild animals eyes his charges. The crowd itself, silent and close-packed, awaited the arrival of their sovereign with bared heads, regardless of the weather, and with down-cast eyes. Although there was no sound, not a movement from the people, I always had the impression of one body straining toward the palace that stood half revealed behind its ramparts and its watchtowers in medieval grandeur, concealing heaven knew what subtleties of Oriental life from the curious world at its feet.

As two motorcycles dashed through the palace gates, the crowd stiffened to attention as one man. Then came two cars filled with military and naval aides. And last of all, escorted by police, a long crimson limousine with silver trimmings passed swiftly in a flash of uniforms and white plumes. No cheering greeted it, nor did the people once lift their eyes until the procession had disappeared. Not until the police had relaxed and turned away, did the people, like communicants withdrawing from the altar rail, replace their hats and move off quietly about their ordinary business.

Once an imperial progress was actually halted and the stilted circumstance dissolved in comedy, but the royalties in question were Prince and Princess Chichibu and not the Emperor. They were passing by in the customary oppressive silence when the air was rent by two tall American boys standing in the front rank of the crowd.

"Hi, Setsuko!" they bellowed. "Howsa girl?"

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

It was so unexpected that they managed to wave a greeting to their schoolmate before the paralyzed police fell on them.

Princess Chichibu stood up impulsively. The impious voices recalled her happy years at the Friends' School in Washington and she turned with an appealing gesture to the Prince beside her. Grinning broadly, he halted the procession and had the culprits brought to the car where the police released their hold with obvious reluctance.

The crowd looked on horrified while greetings were exchanged, and Prince Chichibu insisted that the boys dine with them informally that evening so that his wife might hear the latest news of her classmates.

"Until tonight then — " and "Be seein' you, Setsuko!"

The police fell back, the limousine resumed its interrupted journey, and the boys drifted off, oblivious alike to the malignant glances of the police and the enormity of their conduct. The crowd dispersed with its usual air of sober preoccupation, the older people murmuring in deep disapproval: "The tomboy princess. What will she do next, I wonder?"

## 2

Within a stone's throw of that new, progressive city is a labyrinth of narrow, crooked lanes where the bulk of Tokyo's seven millions live and love, ply their trades and die. In such localities the law is less in evidence but has greater sway. The way is far too narrow for the most hair-

## *Paradox Isle*

brained taxi driver to nose his car successfully; so no traffic lights halt the occasional ricksha that trundles past with its black gauze curtains drawn.

Pedestrians who pick their way on high wooden clogs and errand boys who balance single-handed a whole repast, tacking their bicycles perilously through the strolling throng, are left to their fate by the policeman, who seldom emerges from his small wooden cubicle at the corner. So when they do appear en masse, it heralds — not the approach of an imperial visitor — but the date set for the *osoji*, or semi-annual housecleaning.

Under a tent fly at the corner the police set up a temporary shelter with folding chairs and table, a game of *go* for idle hours, and the inevitable china tea set. At this signal each merchant reluctantly suspends all business and the housewife ties the youngest babe to grandmother's back and farms them out with relatives who live in another district. Then she and every other able-bodied member of the clan man a scrubbing brush and turn to at home with soap and water. Each building is stripped down to the foundations, the front removed entirely, the rooms emptied of all they contain. The merchandise and furniture are heaped with some concern for order upon the narrow sidewalks, but the trash is pitched any way into the streets where flocks of ragged Outcasts poke among the unsavory piles with sharp pointed sticks.

Inside the houses cupboards are scoured, fresh white paper pasted on the sliding doors, and even the floor is

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

taken up in sections so the mats may be turned over or renewed. From sunrise on, the street reverberates to the uneven rataplan of bamboo paddles on wadded floor mats; the air is thick with dust and flying bits of straw and the workers are disguised as though for a burglar's carnival with cotton turbans on their heads and black masks covering their faces to the eyes. Although practically impervious to the extremes of heat and cold and to the use of human fertilizer to grow their vegetables, the Japanese have a disproportionate fear of dust. Even the policemen on duty wear black velvet nose-masks when they make the rounds to see that the work is done on schedule time, that no careless housewife scamps on the prescribed routine, or that the prowling scavengers limit their findings to the rubbish piles alone.

By sunset of the third day order is restored. The towering heaps of debris have vanished as completely as the police tent with its group of yawning inmates. Children once more romp up and down the street; families gather in the room behind their shops for evening rice; people in light cotton bath kimono emerge from the circling mists and amble to the public bath house, cotton towel in hand. The common life resumes its steady ebb and flow past the police box where the guardian of law and order fights off mosquitoes with a small paper fan on sultry summer evenings or, during the chill blue twilights of the Big Cold, blows on his stiff fingers and pokes the charcoal in his brazier into feeble flame.

## *Paradox Isle*

### 3

Only twice during the years I lived in Japan have I seen the law openly defied, and both times the offender was a woman. An old woman, to be sure, a grandmother with white hair cropped short like a boy's who, though bent and doddering, paddles along with vengeful obstinacy on every family outing, as though determined to get something of her own back after a youth of rigid self-denial.

Passing the public bathhouse one summer day I saw the local gendarme gazing mournfully at his white trousers which were soaked and soiled beyond repair and making futile attempts to dry his coat with a cotton handkerchief. I stopped to sympathize and inquired what had happened to him, had he fallen in the bath?

"*Oni baba* — old hellcats!" he exclaimed with fervent emphasis, glowering at two frail old women who had just emerged and were tottering up the hill together cackling maliciously.

"It is such as they that make a policeman's life so difficult." They had nearly wrecked the bathhouse, he explained, fighting like tigers because one of them had turned on the cold water tap. They had splashed each other so viciously that all the peaceful noncombatants had been driven from the tub; then they had hurled the rinsing buckets back and forth, breaking the windows, splintering the electric lights with reckless abandon. The

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

proprietor, after a vain attempt to interfere, had sent for the police.

"As soon as I came in they turned on me together. Now condescend to look at the uniform that should last me for a week. No one willingly tackles an old woman. Our hearts become small when we are sent to face one down."

Warming to his grievance, he went on to say that foreign women too were a constant worry to the police. They usually pretended that they could not understand Japanese, one never knew what they would do next, and they seemed so "strong."

I was tempted to recommend a copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which I knew the Tokyo police had translated into Japanese, hoping it would prove valuable in dealing with European women. A youthful gendarme had gone armed with a copy to Kyoto with orders to prevent a group of American school teachers from going on to north China a few months before the outbreak of war. "But there is something wrong with that book," he told a friend of mine in gloomy retrospect. "I learned most of it by heart, but those American woman only laughed — and went right on to Peking."

An aura of suspicion surrounds any traveler in Japan. That foreigners — mad and spendthrift as they are — would come all that distance and at such expense for the sole purpose of admiring scenery is quite outside the

## *Paradox Isle*

bounds of plausibility to the thrifty and suspicious Japanese. It takes a strong inducement to make one of them leave the homeland, and when he does he is expected to bring something back to it, be it riches, new business methods, technical knowledge of some kind, or a map of our Pacific coast defenses. The Japanese himself is always a potential spy and, having little carnival spirit and even less imagination, he simply cannot believe that anyone would travel far from home purely on pleasure bent.

I never bought a railway ticket for one of the resorts within easy reach of Tokyo that the local policeman did not appear at my kitchen door within the hour, notebook in hand.

Where was I going? Although he knew perfectly. Lake Kawaguchi? Ha! But why was I going there, that was the important question, with whom and for how long? The answers were carefully recorded in his little book, tea was produced, and with the business of foreign spies disposed of, his visit assumed an air of easy sociability.

If a policeman remained on duty at the same post for long, he often took a proprietary interest in the household and was not above hanging up his coat and sword-belt in the kitchen to freeze ice cream or crack the ice for mint juleps. If the *amah* was a young and pretty one he might forget his high estate sufficiently to help her bathe the dogs.

But there was always an ugly tale or two in circulation, enough to keep us aware that these obliging little men

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

were the same ones who massacred the Koreans, beat socialists to death and harried university students suspected of harboring "dangerous thoughts." They made the country almost unbearable for the White Russians who had found refuge there; and their callous inhumanity to a pitiful and desperate people who had no government to defend their rights was but a foretaste of the treatment accorded helpless enemy nationals at the outbreak of the war, and surely must derive from a deep-seated sense of their own inferiority.

The extremes to which a Japanese will go to avoid any contact with the law is a merciless sidelight on what he has learned to expect by way of justice. A stranger falling foul of the Japanese police has his own embassy or consulate to demand redress, but the average citizen cannot call the law to account. Within the limits of his own precinct that droll little man with the tin sword is Authority, against which there can be no appeal by those who hold the fountainhead of that authority to be divine.

### 4

An incredible example of this came to my ears during the last summer in Japan, and the policeman involved was Jiro Watanabe, an obscure, hard-working member of Tokyo's Metropolitan police. His wife was one of Suzuki's innumerable relatives.

Going into the kitchen on some errand one hot afternoon, I saw a shabby little man rise to his feet and bow,

## *Paradox Isle*

saying that he was Watanabe who had been on duty at the compound police box some years before. Did I remember him?

I did recall him, chiefly because he was so short that even in a country of small men he was conspicuous; an absurd creature who made up for his lack of stature by a great show of truculence. But without his uniform, shorn of his self-important air Jiro Watanabe had dwindled strangely. In his cheap staple fibre suit he seemed to be a broken man, one who had seriously lost face.

Excusing my failure to recognize him by the fact that he was not in uniform, I asked if he was having a vacation. At this his face was convulsed by some strong emotion; he shuffled awkwardly, twisting a battered hat in his hands. In a choked voice he admitted that he had recently been dismissed from the police force, but it had been a mistake. He had been so intent upon an important duty that he had overlooked for an instant a trifling regulation. His years of faithful service had counted for nothing and he had been disgraced.

Evidently he wished to vindicate himself, and with his bowl of tea untouched beside him on the floor, he poured out his story. I filled in the background for myself, as he went along, from my recollection of those dusty little streets by the canal, where once Jiro Watanabe had held undisputed sway.

The big mobilization in July had taken the best and ablest men in the police force for the army, leaving those

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

who had been judged unfit for rigorous campaigning. Among the latter was Jiro Watanabe. To reinforce their sagging morale, the Home Minister had called the rejected members of the force together and talked to them for three mortal hours about their increased responsibilities.

They had been denied the glorious privilege of dying for their Emperor on the field of battle, he admitted, but condescend to remember that there was most important work for them at home. Extra vigilance was needed to keep in check the lawless elements that took advantage of a national emergency, and every infringement of the law was a stain on the bright nimbus of the Emperor's honor. What man among them would not give his life to prevent a monstrous crime like this? Let them be keen, ruthless in the performance of their duty, nor must they forget for an instant that the imperial prestige was in their hands.

Deeply impressed by the Minister's stirring words, Watanabe returned to his police box by the canal filled with a new loyalty for his sovereign and pride as his humble representative. From that time he was a terror to the impudent *kozo* who delivered orders of fish and bean curd from the small shops in the neighborhood; and the most piratical taxi drivers were made to stop their dilapidated Fords and approach the police box humbly, ragged cap in hand, before they might turn into one of the mean streets that converged at his corner. The gesture with

## *Paradox Isle*

which he finally waved them on would not have disgraced the Emperor.

The only people in the district who did not stand in mortal fear of Jiro Watanabe were the children. Having none of his own had been a source of bitter grief, he said sadly. Suitengo-sama had been deaf to his prayers for a son to follow in his footsteps, or even a daughter to care for him in his old age.

"His woman is as barren as a ricefield after the harvest," Suzuki explained tersely, for to her mind a childless wife was a calamitous freak of nature, like a barren cow.

All of his frustrated paternity had gone into his care for the ragged little urchins who made a hazardous playground of the canal bank. His fondness for them was the subject of much comment among the people in the shops and houses along the waterway, as he had sometimes let the small boys hold his sword. Only for a minute to be sure, as it was sacred to him, the symbol of his authority and power. Even while he slept on duty, he announced naïvely, the sword always lay across his knees.

A few weeks before, he had been sitting in his police box pondering the Home Minister's words, devising new ways to promote law and order in his precinct. It was very warm in his cramped shelter, he said mildly, and that simple statement evoked a picture of the little street for me, baking under the August sunlight and a thick coverlet of dust.

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

There was no sign of life in the shops, across whose open fronts long bamboo shades were lowered to keep out the glare. Even the rice stall was deserted, the dealer having locked his bins and disappeared as soon as the last woman in the long queue of applicants had received her measured cupful. A disheveled yellow hen was making a slim meal from a few scattered grains upon the floor, while two others, taking a dust bath in the road, gossiped about her in low tones.

A goldfish vendor ambled into view, his shimmering cargo suspended from a yoke laid across his shoulders. His long yodeling cry — *kingyo-o-o* — had a soothing quality, embodying the inertia of the hot afternoon, and it brought him no customers. Probably the man expected none, for he trotted off quite unconcerned, leaving small splashes of water behind him that ran like quicksilver in the dust. The chant of the coolie women hardly broke the ensuing silence, so regularly did their voices rise and fall with the dredge at which they strained under the pitiless sun. The shrill cries of the children playing on the canal bank reached Jiro Watanabe in widening circles of sound as he dropped off to sleep.

Suddenly his sword fell from his knees with a clatter and he sprang up, fighting his way back to alertness. Some note of alarm, a new quality in the children's cries, had penetrated his slumbers and sent him hurrying from the police box with all the haste he thought compatible with his position. Half blinded by the sudden glare, he stum-

## *Paradox Isle*

bled over an abandoned bicycle sprawled athwart the tow path, ruining his white trousers, damaging his dignity beyond forgiveness. Boiling with anger, he reached the top of the steep bank and looked down.

Emerging from the filthy water and rank weeds that bordered the sluggish stream was the careless bicycle owner himself. He wore the uniform of a Boy Scout and carried a dripping bundle in his arms from which a round black head dangled limply. Pushing his way through the squealing children, he laid the dolorous bundle of wet rags at Watanabe's feet, the light of conscious virtue gleaming through his spectacles. His good deed for that day had been accomplished — a deed of such outstanding merit that his knees shook with excitement as he composed himself to receive the policeman's words of praise with proper modesty.

Glancing briefly at the baby, Jiro Watanabe recognized it instantly as the sickly one of a coolie woman's brood. Had he not hovered over its threadbare mat often enough, moving it into the shade, fanning the flies away from the sores on its head while it slept? In that one glance, he saw that its breath came falteringly between blue lips, and his heart became small in his breast.

Something must be done before it was too late, but his duty came first. Drawing himself up to his full height, he launched the blast of his official wrath against the luckless hero.

"Worm-hearted one! Disgrace to the Scouts. You must

## *The Judgment of Solomon*

know better than to pass a police box without dismounting to salute. That was bad enough, but your worthless bicycle in the path was a danger to all, and you rescued a baby from drowning *without asking my permission!*”

The scout shifted uneasily. “It is very difficult,” he sighed. “I had only thought to do my good deed for to-day.” In mute vindication, he pointed to the bundle on the ground between them.

“Then I must teach you respect for authority,” Watanabe roared. “Pick the baby up. Put it into the water exactly as you found it, then come and ask my permission to take it out. Be quick about it. The baby hardly breathes.”

A look of horror succeeded the perplexity on the boy’s face as Watanabe’s meaning reached him, but he did not hesitate. The law had spoken. Stooping, he gathered the baby into his arms and scrambling down the bank he placed it gently in the water among the reeds.

There was no outcry from the mother, although she must have heard the judgment of Solomon, as the dredging had stopped temporarily and the coolie women were standing about listlessly, wiping their steaming faces on the towels tied to their girdles. Only the cicadas in the surrounding trees dared raise their voices in a long strident protest.

The children, quiet for once, gazed with round eyes at the two or three bubbles that came to the surface. After that there was nothing to mark the place.

Into that apathetic group marched a police inspector,

## *Paradox Isle*

holding a sword and belt accusingly at arm's length. He halted and eyed Watanabe sternly.

"Does this belong to you?" he asked.

Clearing away the mist that blurred his eyes and bound his throat, Watanabe clapped his hand to his thigh in a familiar gesture and held it there rigid, shielding his official nakedness. "It must be mine," he stammered. "An emergency arose . . ." But an imperious white-gloved hand cut short his explanation.

"You know the penalty for breaking any regulation at a time like this," the officer said harshly. "You heard the Home Minister's words, yet I find your sword lying in the dust and you idling your time away with women and children."

Tying the belt into a noose just below the handle of the sword, the inspector slipped it on his arm and turned away. "Report yourself to your headquarters in arrest," he ordered. "I have already summoned your relief."

---

---

## CHAPTER IX

### *The First and Last Ambassadors*

---

---

*"It's a good service you have done, Sirs,  
A service that spreads through two worlds."*

Noh Drama: NISHIKIJI

---

#### 1

Not until we arrived at the American Embassy on the morning of December 8th did most of us dream we were actually at war with Japan. Not until we were hustled into the compound just as we stood up and the gates were slammed behind us by a formidable array of police, cutting us off forever from our houses, our habits and our secure little yesterdays.

"You are enemy peoples," they told us. "We must treat you as such."

At first, the immediate problem of providing food and bedding for everyone and a toothbrush apiece absorbed our combined energies and thoughts, but once that was accomplished other needs replaced them. Our accustomed lives, so cheerful and humdrum, crammed with inter-

## *Paradox Isle*

ests and activities, had vanished in an hour, and in the ensuing vacuum events had lost their true perspective while the people around us seemed unsubstantial or grotesque, as familiar objects do when held too close to the eyes.

Some sort of makeshift existence, put together with whatever odds and ends lay at hand, was obviously necessary, and after a good deal of discussion and a few false starts everybody settled to an occupation that diverted us at times from brooding fears about the progress of the war and the possible fate of fellow Americans in the hands of the Japanese. One group organized a series of Bridge tournaments; others formed classes in French, in Spanish or Japanese; and restless spirits who found difficulty in adjusting themselves to close quarters and long idle days, worked off their surplus energy with golf and badminton. Thoughtful souls decided to keep diaries which might afford them a small measure of mental privacy, and casual people like myself sought their books in a corresponding mood.

We were fortunate enough to be sheltered and fed, the one essential boon denied to us was privacy. Doors were always opening and someone coming in; all our possessions were common property and far too many of our thoughts; every act was known, passed along in an incredibly short time and distorted in the process until it assumed a most unwarranted significance. So, when my allotted tasks were accomplished I found shelter in the

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

library whenever it was unoccupied except for its company of mute, indifferent books, those thrice blessed keepers of the gates of seclusion.

Then too, the library was a refuge from the streets outside, a long quiet room facing away from the town. It overlooked the Embassy gardens where the "enemy peoples" were busy with games or lounged in the sunshine, and its open casements let in the distant sound of laughter and voices raised in amiable controversy. By contrast, the streets had a strange blind look, with wooden shutters closed on so many shops which had nothing more to sell. The long stretches of pavement were practically deserted except for an occasional errand boy, or a few poorly clad people who stopped outside the Embassy gates to gape at the police and point to our flag staff, standing as bare and desolate as a whip without the stars and stripes.

The library offered respite from the noises of the streets as well, a one-time motley hubbub that five years of war had reduced to the monotony of "Boots-boots-boots-boots movin' up and down again." After a time, the town rocked to the beat of marching feet — the steady tramp of soldiers, timed to their dreary battle song; the scuffling tread of school children trudging a weary pilgrimage from shrine to shrine; and the *kara-karon* of wooden clogs as patriotic guilds paraded past, marshaled by police who led the catcalls for England and America and wild *banzai* for the latest Japanese victory.

## *Paradox Isle*

At such times the quiet of the library, within sight and sound of my own countrymen was a simple necessity if I was to hold fast to the belief that the present was not all.

Resolutely I skimmed the mystery stories, thumbed through lighthearted travelogues about places as distant from Japan as possible, but some spirit of perversity — the same, perhaps, that makes us shun the books our friends have recommended — prevented me from finding in their pages the distraction that I sought. It guided me to a diary, although by that time diaries were the subject of much good-humored joking, one that had been written in Japan as well, by the first American Ambassador who arrived in the country to find himself practically in our predicament.

*"Thursday, DECEMBER 25th,"* I read opening it at random. "Merry Christmas! How happy are those who live in civilized lands where these joyous greetings can be exchanged! As for me I am . . . living as one may say in a prison — a large one it is true — but still a prison."

Here was a coincidence. Reading 1941 for 1856 and this brief record of the first Christmas Townsend Harris spent in Japan might be Mr. Grew's last Christmas entry with equal aptness and immediacy. Pleased with the discovery, I settled down with the book to see how far the analogy would go, and gradually there emerged from its sedate pages one instance upon another that bore an uncanny resemblance to events in the preceding days. Although both officials had been held in high esteem by the

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

Japanese, they evidently had shared the same unenviable fate: The first American Ambassador arrived in Japan to find himself virtually a prisoner, and for the final six months of his stay in the country our last American Ambassador was a prisoner in fact. The *Journal* went on to show how many of the pitfalls avoided by Mr. Harris and the problems he faced in dealing with a primitive, suspicious people have been, after almost a century of so-called progress, recently and amply shared by Mr. Grew, with one important difference.

The governing authorities in Japan who dealt with Mr. Harris, in spite of their attempts to obstruct his purpose, really desired to establish relations with the Western powers, and the American Ambassador was fortunate enough to be rowing with the tide. But there is some element in the Japanese stubbornly opposed to any permanent affiliations with the West.

In 1542 the Jesuits and foreign traders were made welcome in Japan, only to be forcibly expelled in 1587. Then the Shogun Iyeyasu, a progressive and far-sighted ruler, sought commercial relations with the Philippines and New Spain in 1598. He also sent for naval architects and skilled artisans of all sorts to instruct Japanese workmen in their crafts, opened his ports to Dutch and English traders and encouraged foreign missionaries to establish schools. But his grandson Iyemitsu clung to the belief that Japan was only for the Japanese. He forbade Japanese vessels to go abroad or his subjects to leave the

## *Paradox Isle*

country, and those already beyond its borders were put to death on their return. "So long as the sun warms the earth," he thundered, "let no Christian be so bold as to come to Japan."

In 1858 Townsend Harris negotiated the first treaty between Japan and any foreign power, which Japan ratified with the avowed object of "laying a foundation for securing the hegemony over all nations." In 1932 the Japanese government began to drop its European advisers; the large commercial firms dismissed the foreign experts in their employ, saying their services were no longer needed, Japan could carry on alone; foreign teachers in the universities found that their contracts were not being renewed; foreign personnel in the big mission hospitals were adroitly eliminated; English language newspapers were taken from their owners by means of forced sales; and foreign clergymen were asked to leave their churches. Inexorably Japan was turning in upon itself again, making it as clear by act as Iyemitsu did in words that once more the tide had swung, and during those years before the war the last American Ambassador pulled steadily against it.

## 2

To return to the *Journal*: Nothing could have been more inviting than the first glimpse Townsend Harris had of his new post when the *San Jacinto* dropped anchor in the harbor of Shimoda one August afternoon in 1856.

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

Square-sailed fishing sampans dotted the still blue waters and hemmed in by a circle of conical green hills was the town itself, a mere huddle of thatched houses following the shore sweep, like shaggy animals crouched at a water hole.

The quiet beauty of the place was misleading, however, and his difficulties with the Japanese authorities started before the American official had set foot on shore. Instead of the welcome he had rightfully expected from the Governors of Shimoda, they used every ruse at their command to delay the formal acceptance of his credentials until some scheme could be devised to rid the country permanently of the foreigner's unwelcome presence, with a fine disregard for treaty obligations.

In this first encounter, as in later dealings with him, the Japanese gave way before the patience and determination of the strange American who never once allowed discouragement or ill-health to float him over the shallows of their bad faith. So, when their prepared excuses were exhausted the Governors offered Mr. Harris a grudging recognition, a ramshackle temple to serve as office and residence as well, and set up within the temple grounds a flag pole of the height he had carefully stipulated.

A week after his arrival in Japan an oddly assorted group gathered at its base to witness a ceremony which was new to that inhospitable country. Mr. Harris with his Dutch interpreter Heuskens, some officers and men from

## *Paradox Isle*

the *San Jacinto*, and a few minor Japanese officials stood with bared heads while the first American flag rose slowly above the trees, and the surrounding hills echoed to the rolling thunder of a twenty-one gun salute from the warship in the harbor.

What feelings of resentment and dismay the Japanese may have concealed behind their customary mask no one has ever heard, but we do know that the American official's pride at seeing the stars and stripes above his head was mixed with "grim reflections." He was troubled too, because so momentous an event was not marked by greater circumstance and pomp, but whatever his misgivings were about the future, the farsighted man was spared the knowledge of how short a time the flag would fly in that inhospitable country, and with what scant ceremony the last one would come down.

Before war had been declared on the morning of December 8th, the American Embassy in Tokyo was taken over by the Japanese police. They swarmed into the Ambassador's residence, through the apartments and the Chancery in search of radios, demanding that the office safes be opened and their contents surrendered without delay. A column of black smoke from the barred door of the code room spread through the corridors, bringing several of the patrolling police to investigate. Something about that grimy, desperate-looking crew within, stirring their strange witches' brew in metal wastebaskets must

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

have deterred them, for they moved on, choking, without any interference.

High above all the confusion the stars and stripes spread out smartly in the breeze until a policeman, scanning the roof for radio antennae, caught sight of it and rapped out a brusque order to one of our Japanese employees.

“Take down that flag!”

“I just put it up,” the man stammered. “They always keep it there till evening.”

“Take it down, you fool,” the officer shouted, “and never put it up again. Americans are enemies. We are at war.”

Reluctantly the man retraced his steps to the flag pole, loosened the ropes, and the bright colored bunting slipped down smoothly and lay coiled at his feet. The only witnesses to our emblem’s final and inglorious exit from the scene were the soldiers and police on guard, and a small group of frightened people from the near-by shops and houses who observed proceedings from a discreet distance, while their radios blared out the tidings of a glorious Japanese victory at Pearl Harbor.

### 3

Mr. Harris devoted several pages in his *Journal* to fulminations against the Japanese police. Arriving at his house from the *San Jacinto*, he found them already es-

## *Paradox Isle*

tablished in his front rooms, prepared to stay indefinitely. In answer to his protests the Governor of Shimoda assured him that their presence was a necessary precaution for his safety, as the people in Shimoda were hostile and apt to do him harm. "A greater tissue of lies was never heard," Mr. Harris retorted angrily.

He was correct in thinking his every move was under strict surveillance. Police were present while he negotiated a convention with the Governors; police followed him on his walks about the country; they harried and questioned his servants and examined every purchase delivered to his house. After months of futile protest, Mr. Harris evidently exploded, as the Japanese account of his interview with the officials says the American "behaved like a madman."

"I demanded the removal of the people who had been in my compound since my arrival. . . . Their presence made me in reality a prisoner and was a gross violation of the Treaty." A firm hand was necessary in dealing with such people, Mr. Harris went on to say, they were "the greatest liars on earth."

The Japanese were alarmed because he shouted, waved his arms and stamped his feet, but the stiff homily he delivered them on truthfulness fell on hard ground, like the proverbial mustard seed, and with the same lack of result.

This national frailty never failed to outrage Mr. Harris, although there was more excuse for it in his time. As

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

an island tribe existing in strict isolation, the Japanese created their own code of ethics without the formative and healthy pressure of public opinion. Almost a century of association with other nations has made no appreciable difference in their attitude toward truth, however, and as I have remarked elsewhere, they have found no need for the word in their language as yet.

Nor has the Japanese official mind matured since the first American Ambassador fumed against the petty restrictions devised for his humiliation, as during the six months of his incarceration our last Ambassador was never free from the intrusive police. Day and night they prowled through the grounds and buildings of the Embassy, ignorant peasants, swollen with pride at this unexpected opportunity to bully high-ranking American officials with whom, in normal times, they would not have come in contact. Members of the staff who had been ejected from their houses and taken refuge in the Chancery offices were powerless to prevent some bullet-headed oaf from marching into their improvised bedrooms without warning or apology. Every package delivered to the Embassy was examined at the gate and again in the police office, its need and use explained by the infuriated owner before he was at liberty to claim it. Yet it was all carried out with farcical gestures of amenity.

Whenever a slight earthquake shook Shimoda or one of the frequent thunderstorms circled the surrounding hills, the Governor's representative arrived posthaste to

## *Paradox Isle*

inquire if Mr. Harris had been inconvenienced or if his health had suffered. The attention was lost upon that disillusioned man who was not even amused by it, dismissing it sourly as another "Japanese ruse."

On New Year's morning 1942, we Embassy internees were electrified when our chief oppressor, Kiyokawa, appeared in all the glory of a frock coat and ancient top hat. Flanked by his henchmen in their best staple fibre suits, he marched importantly past the Chancery and was greeted by a cheer from the army language students.

"Happy New Year, Kiyokawa-san!" They shouted cordially. "We hope you trip and break your neck."

"Sank you, sank you, gent'emen!" Kiyokawa bowed and tipped his hat with a flourish. His knowledge of English did not go much beyond: "You prisoner now. You obey *me*." Pleased and flattered by this unexpected overture, he went on his way to wish the American Ambassador a very happy New Year.

"Well, I give up," said one witness to this brief interchange of civilities. "Where on earth would your jailer appear in a frock coat and silk hat to wish you the compliments of the season except in this cock-eyed country?"

### 4

Except on the rare occasions when a foreign vessel came into port, Mr. Harris had no associate of his own race but his interpreter, Heuskens. Considering the young man shared his house and was, for months on end, his

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

sole companion, we learn very little of him from the *Journal* beyond the fact that he was apt to let the stove go out on winter evenings. We also know that he "ran like a deer" to the lookout on Signal Hill whenever it was rumored that a feather of black smoke had been sighted on the horizon, so he was lonely too. Mr. Harris would follow at a more decorous pace, and together they would stand on the hill straining their eyes for a sight of the ship that meant letters, news from home and the comradeship of their own kind. Not until darkness had put an end to their hopes did they return in silence through the shadowed lanes to the house, where Mr. Harris would take out his *Journal* to remark: . . . "I am more isolated than any American official in any part of the world."

Mr. Harris had no friends among the Japanese, who were not only forbidden to call upon him, but dared not return his greetings when he met them abroad. He believed their attitude arose from fear rather than enmity, but his ostracism preyed on his mind and undermined his health. He dwelt so scrupulously upon the virtues of the plain people that one is inclined to believe he found them, as many have before and since, more estimable than likeable as a race. He granted them the qualities of patience, frugality, loyalty and obedience, but as a choleric old Englishman once exclaimed: "Damn it, madam, who falls in love with attributes?"

When he had been in Japan almost a year, the law forbidding natives to enter the dwelling of a foreigner

## *Paradox Isle*

was rescinded. The Governors of Shimoda accepted his invitation to a "feast of foreign foods," and his pleasure at this rather dubious boon was pathetic. The guests arrived with their customary retinue and "without hesitation showed their approval by their eating." And by their drinking too, he might have added, as they consumed large quantities of punch, brandy, whiskey, cherry-bounce, champagne, cordials, and "showed themselves to be of a most genial temper," as well they might.

Incidentally, they also showed themselves to be far more proficient potmen than this present generation of Japanese officials, who grow blear-eyed and confused after a drink or two, forfeiting the dignity lent by their natural gravity and restraint.

After a ten-year residence in their country which won him the respect and confidence of the Japanese, the last American Ambassador spent his final six months among them *incommunicado*. During that time neither his foreign nor his Japanese friends were permitted to approach him, and his rare trips outside the compound were made under guard.

When the Dutch Minister died — a forlorn death as prisoner in a country where he had served with honor for many years — the American Ambassador asked permission to pay his last respects to a colleague. After one flat refusal and a long debate, the request was granted, but only upon condition that he spoke to no one at the funeral to which he went accompanied by police.

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

Although the Swiss Government took charge of American affairs soon after the outbreak of war, it was a week before their Minister in Tokyo gained entrance to the American Embassy, and Mr. Grew could communicate with his own government. Those eight days had been tedious and everyone hurried out cheering at sight of the Swiss Legation car, thinking we would hear some news at last. But the police were ahead of us and we arrived to find our sole link with the outside world surrounded by our jailers. The Minister might speak to the American Ambassador only, they announced, and the disgusted diplomat was led off by the ubiquitous Kiyokawa and his minions. These incidents were trivial enough, just another annoyance added to the mounting score, but they raised the grim spectre that haunted us persistently.

If the Japanese subjected the Ambassador to such treatment, how were our other nationals faring at their hands? We knew their habitual control covered a sort of imbecile ferocity, and what might be the fate of the American correspondents, the bankers, business men and missionaries in their power did not bear thinking of.

### 5

After a whole year of false hopes and disappointments, Heuskens arrived breathless from Signal Hill to report an American man of war on the horizon. The happiness this "joyful news" gave Mr. Harris was shared years later by his interned compatriots when two of Doolittle's

## *Paradox Isle*

raiders appeared suddenly in the clear noonday sky.

Their coming was timed perfectly. Something was needed to drag our spirits from the depths to which they had been plunged by the most recent breakdown in negotiations for our exchange. As with Townsend Harris, our hopes had been raised so often in the preceding months that each setback left our morale at lower ebb, and this time, although it had not been actually expressed, we faced the possibility of remaining in Japan throughout the war, and the whole compound was wrapped in gloom.

An air raid drill had been scheduled by the Japanese for that particular day, so when the sirens bawled on all sides, no one paid the slightest heed. But an hysterical inconsistency about their brays, matched by the panic among the police, who ran in circles shouting orders above the din as they strapped on tin helmets, caught our attention. With one accord we rushed to the roof — more like stampeding cattle than like deer — arriving in time to see a mass of smoke and flame rise suddenly above the intervening acres of gray slate, and two bombers speed across the sky in opposite directions pursued by flashes and white puffs that sometimes caught and hid them from sight.

“Those aren’t Japanese planes,” somebody shouted.  
“They’re ours. They’re *ours!*”

“It’s real antiaircraft fire too. Watch the bursts.”

“Now you yellow bellied bastards, you’ve asked for it, let’s see if you can take it!”

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

One bomber plunged suddenly through the ragged fringe of smoke and flame. "Oh God, don't let them get him," a voice pleaded. Below the line of fire the plane again leveled off, swung smoothly past the balloon barrage, over the open sea and out of sight, we hoped and prayed, to safety.

It was over before the police arrived to order us below, and while we crowded down the stairs in a gale of excited conjecture, they locked all doors leading to the roof and tore the handles off. But that one glimpse had lifted the pall hanging over us and the buildings rang with talk and laughter; feet clattered up and downstairs; doors opened to emit snatches of idiotic song — the kind of nonsense people sing when they are happy. The planes were like a message straight from home to each of us, stiffening our courage, bringing us new hope and something to look forward to — the day they would return.

Next morning the police sent Mr. Grew a solemn warning. Should this outrage occur again, they said, light and water would be turned off in all buildings where Americans were interned, and no food would be supplied to them.

### 6

The American warship also brought good fortune, as long overdue as his mail, to Townsend Harris. While it was still in harbor he learned that success had crowned his year of patient labor; the Japanese had accepted and signed the convention; they also had granted his request

## *Paradox Isle*

to go to Yedo (Tokyo) and present to the Shogun in private audience the letter which President Pierce had written him two years before.

In spite of the pitfalls they had laid for him and their consistent attempts to block his purpose, once the Japanese authorities had capitulated, they received the first foreign diplomat accredited to their country with all possible ceremony and respect. His palanquin was escorted from Shimoda to the Shogun's palace in Yedo by three hundred and fifty henchmen clad in special costumes showing the coat of arms of the United States, and the sight of the American flag borne at the head of the procession gave Mr. Harris "a fine flow of spirits."

At the capital, the populace lined the streets to do him honor, receiving him in awestruck silence. Only those above a certain rank were allowed to salute him, and all lesser beings prostrated themselves with lowered eyes.

He was permitted to greet the Shogun standing, while rows of courtiers knelt with their faces pressed to the floor, and present him with a letter from the President of the United States. It hailed the Shogun as a "great and good friend," urged closer friendship between the two countries and ended with the pious hope that God might have the Shogun in His safe and holy keeping. The signature was Franklin Pierce.

After an impressive pause the Shogun expressed pleasure at receiving an embassy from a distant country, and

## *The First and Last Ambassadors*

finished the address by proclaiming: "This intercourse will be continued forever."

But he was wrong. Just eighty-four years later to the day the last communication was sent to the Emperor of Japan by a President whose first name also was Franklin. Its message was as different from the first as the manner of its presentation.

President Pierce's letter traveled to Japan in the lock-box with the Ambassador's credentials, where it remained for two years before its delivery on December 7, 1857.

President Roosevelt's missive came by wireless and was presented by the American Ambassador the same day it was dispatched — December 7, 1941. It reached the Embassy on Sunday evening, when the night shift was on duty in the code room. Its length and the triple priority mark made them send out a cryptic message that brought code clerks who were off duty back from near-by resorts, out of their beds, or from the moving pictures. Lights flashed on behind darkened windows in the Chancery as staff members hurried in, and the Ambassador waited for the message to emerge from the maze of preposterous word-groups.

An urgent request for a private audience with the Emperor was relayed through the Foreign Office, but this time it was refused, and the Foreign Minister agreed to receive the American Ambassador, providing he did not arrive after midnight.

It was close to that, however, when the last mutilations

## *Paradox Isle*

had been solved and a clean copy of the President's message prepared for the Ambassador to deliver. No retainers in ceremonial robes escorted the last message to its destination while the Tokyo populace bowed to the ground. Few of the belated stragglers returning to their homes through the darkened streets were conscious of the Ford coupé rushing past them with dimmed lights; even fewer dreamed that it carried their last and only chance of avoiding another and more disastrous war.

"Almost a century ago," Mr. Roosevelt called to mind, "the President of the United States addressed to the Emperor of Japan a message extending an offer of friendship of the people of the United States to the people of Japan. That offer was accepted. . . .

"Only in situations of extraordinary importance to our two countries need I address to Your Majesty messages on matters of state. I feel I should now so address you because of the deep and far-reaching emergency which appears to be in formation. . . .

"I address myself to your Majesty so that Your Majesty may, as I am doing, give thought in this definite emergency to ways of dispelling the dark clouds. I am confident that both of us, for the sake of the peoples not only of our own great countries but for the sake of humanity in neighboring territories, have a sacred duty to restore traditional amity and prevent further death and destruction in the world."

A reply to this appeal was received the next morning at Pearl Harbor.



## TYPE NOTE

This book was set on the Linotype in *Bodoni Book*, a printing-type so called after Giambattista Bodoni, a celebrated printer and type designer of Rome and Parma (1740–1813). *Bodoni Book* as produced by the Linotype company is not a copy of any one of Bodoni's fonts, but is a composite, modern version of the Bodoni manner. Bodoni's innovations in printing-type style were a greater degree of contrast in the "thick and thin" elements of the letters, and a sharper and more angular finish of details.

The book was composed, printed, and bound by The Plimpton Press, Norwood, Massachusetts. The typographic and binding designs are by W. A. Dwiggins.





HERE is an absorbing and intimate record of the fourteen years which an American woman spent in Japan as an agent of the Military Intelligence Division. During that period of time Carol Bache lived with and made an intensive study of the common people of the Land of the Rising Sun—their way of life, their habits, their attitudes. And during that time her reports came back to this country to be filed away by G-2. Hers was—in effect—a task of non-military espionage.

With scalpel-like directness, a woman's sharp perception and sensitiveness to her surroundings have cut through the surface realities of daily life among the Japanese to a revelation of their inscrutable character. There is humor here and drama, and there is a subtle picture of the grave threat which lurked beneath the colorful exterior. This recounting of her many strange and fascinating experiences is an outgrowth of the author's desire to find—in her survey of their sum total—the secret heart of the country in which she worked.

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



126 258

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY